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OF

THE WORKS OF

RUDYARD KIPLING

THE NAULAHKA

VOL. II

THE NAULAHKA

A STORY OF WEST AND EAST

BY

RUDYARD KIPLING
AND
WOLCOTT BALESTIER

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II

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XIII

Beat off in our last fight were we?
The greater need to seek the sea;
For Fortune changeth as the moon
To caravel and picaroon.
Then, Eastward Ho! or Westward Ho!
Whichever wind may meetest blow.
Our quarry sails on either sea,
Fat prey for such bold lads as we.
And every sun-dried buccaneer
Must hand and reef and watch and steer,
And bear great wrath of sea and sky
Before the plate-ships wallow by.
Now, as our tall bow takes the foam,
Let no man turn his heart to home,
Save to desire land the more,
And larger warehouse for his store,
When treasure won from Santos Bay
Shall make our sea-washed village gay.

Blackbeard.

FIBBY and Tarvin ate their breakfast together, half an hour later, in the blotched shadows of the scrub below the wall. The horse buried his nose into his provender, and said nothing.

The man was equally silent. Once or twice he rose to his feet, scanned the irregular line of wall and bastion, and shook his head. He had no desire to return there. As the sun grew fiercer he found a resting-place in the heart of a circle of thorn, tucked the saddle under his head, and lay down to sleep. Fibby, rolling luxuriously, followed his master's example. The two took their rest while the air quivered with heat and the hum of insects, and the browsing goats clicked and pattered through the water-channels.

The shadow of the Tower of Glory lengthened, fell across the walls, and ran far across the plain; the kites began to drop from the sky by twos and threes; and naked children, calling one to another, collected the goats and drove them to the smoky villages before Tarvin roused himself for the homeward journey.

He halted Fibby once for a last look at Gunnaur as they reached the rising ground. The sunlight had left the walls, and they ran black against the misty levels and the turquoise-blue of the twilight. Fires twinkled from a score of huts about the base of the city, but along the ridge of the desolation itself there was no light.

'Mum's the word, Fibby,' said Tarvin, picking up his reins. 'We don't think well of this picnic, and we won't mention it at Rhatore.'

He chirruped, and Fibby went home as swiftly as he could lay hoof to stone, only once suggesting refreshment. Tarvin said nothing till the end of the long ride, when he heaved a deep sigh of relief as he dismounted in the fresh sunlight of the morning.

Sitting in his room, it seemed to him a waste of a most precious opportunity that he had not manufactured a torch in Gunnaur and thoroughly explored the passage. But the memory of the green eyes and the smell of musk came back to him, and he shivered. The thing was not to be done. Never again, for any consideration, under the wholesome light of the sun, would he, who feared nothing, set foot in the Cow's Mouth.

It was his pride that he knew when he had had enough. He had had enough of the Cow's Mouth; and the only thing for which he still wished in connection with it was to express his mind about it to the Maharajah. Unhappily, this was impossible. That idle monarch, who, he now saw plainly, had sent him there either in a mood of luxurious sportiveness or to throw him off the scent of the necklace, remained the only man from whom he could look for final victory. It was not to the Maharajah that he could afford to say all that he thought.

Fortunately the Maharajah was too much en-

tertained by the work which Tarvin immediately instituted on the Amet River to inquire particularly whether his young friend had sought the Naulahka at the Gye Mukh. Tarvin had sought an audience with the King the morning after his return from that black spot, and, with the face of a man who had never known fear and who lacks the measure of disappointments, gaily demanded the fulfilment of the King's promise. Having failed in one direction on a large scale, he laid the first brick on the walls of a new structure without delay, as the people of Topaz had begun to build their town anew the morning after the fire. His experience at the Gye Mukh only sharpened his determination, adding to it a grim willingness to get even with the man who had sent him there.

The Maharajah, who felt in especial need of amusement that morning, was very ready to make good his promise, and ordered that the long man who played pachisi should be granted all the men he could use. With the energy of disgust, and with a hot memory of the least assured and comfortable moments of his life burning in his breast, Tarvin flung himself on the turning of the river and the building of his dam. It was necessary, it seemed, in the land upon which he had fallen, to raise a dust to hide one's ends. He would raise a dust, and it should be on the same

scale as the catastrophe which he had just encountered—thorough, business-like, uncompromising.

He raised it, in fact, in a stupendous cloud. Since the State was founded no one had seen anything like it. The Maharajah lent him all the convict labour of his jails, and Tarvin marched the little host of leg-ironed *kaidies* into camp at a point five miles beyond the city walls, and solemnly drew up his plans for the futile damming of the barren Amet. His early training as a civil engineer helped him to lay out a reasonable plan of operations, and to give a semblance of reality to his work. His notion was to back up the river by means of a dam at a point where it swept around a long curve, and to send it straight across the plain by excavating a deep bed for it. When this was completed the present bed of the river would lie bare for several miles, and if there were any gold there, as Tarvin said to himself, then would be the time to pick it up. Meanwhile his operations vastly entertained the King, who rode out every morning and watched him directing his small army for an hour or more. The marchings and counter-marchings of the mob of convicts with baskets, hoes, shovels, and pannier-laden donkeys, the prodigal blasting of rocks, and the general bustle and confusion, drew the applause of the King, for whom Tarvin always reserved his best

blasts. This struck him as only fair, as the King was paying for the powder, and, indeed, for the entire entertainment.

Among the unpleasant necessities of his position was the need of giving daily to Colonel Nolan, to the King, and to all the drummers at the rest-house, whenever they might choose to ask him, his reasons for damming the Amet. The great Indian Government itself also presently demanded his reasons, in writing, for damming the Amet; Colonel Nolan's reasons, in writing, for allowing the Amet to be dammed; and the King's reasons for allowing anybody but a duly authorised agent of the Government to dam the Amet. This was accompanied by a request for further information. To these inquiries Tarvin, for his part, returned an evasive answer, and felt that he was qualifying himself for his political career at home. Colonel Nolan explained officially to his superiors that the convicts were employed in remunerative labour, and, unofficially, that the Maharajah had been so phenomenally good for some time past (being kept amused by this American stranger), that it would be a thousand pities to interrupt the operations. Colonel Nolan was impressed by the fact that Tarvin was the Hon. Nicholas Tarvin, and a member of the legislature of one of the United States.

The Government, knowing something of the irrepressible race who stride booted into the council-halls of kings, and demand concessions for oil-boring from Arracan to the Peshin, said no more, but asked to be supplied with information from time to time as to the progress of the stranger's work. When Tarvin heard this he sympathised with the Indian Government. He understood this thirst for information; he wanted some himself as to the present whereabouts of the Naulahka; also touching the time it would take Kate to find out that she wanted him more than the cure of any misery whatever.

At least twice a week, in fancy, he gave up the Naulahka definitely, returned to Topaz, and resumed the business of a real estate and insurance agent. He drew a long breath after each of these decisions, with the satisfying recollection that there was still one spot on the earth's surface where a man might come directly at his desires if he possessed the sand and the hustle; where he could walk a straight path to his ambition; and where he did not by preference turn five corners to reach an object a block away.

Sometimes, as he grilled patiently in the river bed under the blighting rays of the Indian sun, he would heretically blaspheme the Naulahka, refusing to believe in its existence, and persuading himself

that it was as grotesque a lie as the King's parody of a civilised government, or as Dhunpat Rai's helpful surgery. Yet from a hundred sources he heard of the existence of that splendour, only never in reply to a direct question.

Dhunpat Rai, in particular (once weak enough to complain of the new lady doctor's 'excessive zeal and surplusage administration'), had given him an account that made his mouth water. But Dhunpat Rai had not seen the necklace since the crowning of the present King, fifteen years before. The very convicts on the works, squabbling over the distribution of food, spoke of millet as being as costly as the Naulahka. Twice the Maharaj Kunwar, babbling vaingloriously to his big friend of what he would do when he came to the throne, concluded his confidences with, 'And then I shall wear the Naulahka in my turban all day long.'

But when Tarvin asked him where that precious necklace lived, the Maharaj Kunwar shook his head, answering sweetly, 'I do not know.'

The infernal thing seemed to be a myth, a word, a proverb—anything rather than the finest necklace in the world. In the intervals of blasting and excavation he would make futile attempts to come upon its track. He took the city ward by ward, and explored every temple in each; he rode, under pretence of archæological study, to

the outlying forts and ruined palaces that lay beyond the city in the desert, and roved restlessly through the mausoleums that held the ashes of the dead kings of Rhatore. He told himself a hundred times that he knew each quest to be hopeless; but he needed the consolation of persistent search. And the search was always vain.

Tarvin fought his impatience when he rode abroad with the Maharajah. At the palace, which he visited at least once a day under pretence of talking about the dam, he devoted himself more sedulously than ever to pachisi. It pleased the Maharajah in those days to remove himself from the white marble pavilion in the orange garden, where he usually spent the spring months, to Sitabhai's wing of the red-stone palace, and to sit in the courtyard watching trained parrots firing little cannons, and witnessing combats between fighting quail or great grey apes dressed in imitation of English officers. When Colonel Nolan appeared the apes were hastily dismissed; but Tarvin was allowed to watch the play throughout, when he was not engaged on the dam. He was forced to writhe in inaction and in wonder about his necklace, while these childish games went forward; but he constantly kept the corner of an eye upon the movements of the Maharaj Kunwar. There, at least, his wit could serve some one.

The Maharajah had given strict orders that the child should obey all Kate's instructions. Even his heavy eyes noted an improvement in the health of the little one, and Tarvin was careful that he should know that the credit belonged to Kate alone. With impish perversity the young Prince, who had never received an order in his life before, learned to find joy in disobedience, and devoted his wits, his escort, and his barouche to gambolling in the wing of the palace belonging to Sitabhai. There he found grey-headed flatterers by the score, who abased themselves before him, and told him what manner of king he should be in the years to come. There also were pretty dancing-girls, who sang him songs, and would have corrupted his mind but that it was too young to receive corruption. There were, besides, apes and peacocks and jugglers—new ones every day—together with dancers on the slack-rope, and wonderful packing-cases from Calcutta, out of which he was allowed to choose ivory-handled pistols and little gold-hilted swords with seed pearls set in a groove along the middle, and running musically up and down as he waved the blade round his head. Finally, the sacrifice of a goat in an opal and ivory temple in the heart of the women's quarters, which he might watch, allured him that way. Against these enticements Kate, moody,

grave, distracted, her eyes full of the miseries on which it was her daily lot to look, and her heart torn with the curelessness of it all, could offer only little childish games in the missionary's drawing-room. The heir-apparent to the throne did not care for leap-frog, which he deemed in the highest degree undignified; nor yet for puss-in-the-corner, which seemed to him over-active; nor for tennis, which he understood was played by his brother princes, but which to him appeared no part of a Rajput's education. Sometimes, when he was tired (and on rare occasions when he escaped to Sitabhai's wing it was observable that he returned very tired indeed), he would listen long and intently to the stories of battle and siege which Kate read to him, and would scandalise her at the end of the tale by announcing, with flashing eye—

'When I am king I will make my army do *all* those things.'

It was not in Kate's nature—she would have thought it in the highest degree wrong—to refrain from some little attempt at religious instruction. But here the child retreated into the stolidity of the East, and only said—

'All these things are very good for you, Kate, but all my gods are very good for me; and if my father knew, he would be angry.'

'And what *do* you worship?' asked Kate, pity-

ing the young pagan from the bottom of her heart.

'My sword and my horse,' answered the Maharaj Kunwar; and he half drew the jewelled sabre that was his inseparable companion, returning it with a resolute clank that closed the discussion.

But it was impossible, he discovered, to evade the long man Tarvin as he evaded Kate. He resented being called 'bub,' nor did he approve of 'little man.' But Tarvin could drawl the word 'Prince' with a quiet deference that made the young Rajput almost suspect himself the subject of a jest. And yet Tarvin Sahib treated him as a man, and allowed him, under due precautions, to handle his mighty 'gun,' which was not a gun, but a pistol. And once, when the Prince had coaxed the keeper of the horse into allowing him to bestride an unmanageable mount, Tarvin, riding up, had picked him out of the depths of the velvet saddle, set him on his own saddle-bow, and, in the same cloud of dust, shown him how, in his own country, they laid the reins on one side or the other of the neck of their cattle-ponies to guide them in pursuit of a steer broken from the herd.

The trick of being lifted from his saddle, appealing to the 'circus' latent in the boy breast even of an Eastern prince, struck the Maharaj as so amusing that he insisted on exhibiting it before

Kate; and as Tarvin was a necessary figure in the performance, he allured him into helping him with it one day before the house of the missionary. Mr. and Mrs. Estes came out upon the veranda with Kate and watched the exhibition, and the missionary pursued it with applause and requests for a repetition, which, having been duly given, Mrs. Estes asked Tarvin if he would not stay to dinner with them since he was there. Tarvin glanced doubtfully at Kate for permission, and, by a process of reasoning best known to lovers, construed the veiling of her eyes and the turning of her head into assent.

After dinner, as they sat on the veranda in the starlight, 'Do you really mind?' he asked.

'What?' asked she, lifting her sober eyes and letting them fall upon him.

'My seeing you sometimes. I know you don't like it; but it will help me to look after you. You must see by this time that you need looking after.'

'Oh no.'

'Thank you,' said Tarvin, almost humbly.

'I mean I don't need looking after.'

'But you don't dislike it?'

'It's good of you,' she said impartially.

'Well, then, it will be bad of you not to like it.'

Kate had to smile. 'I guess I like it,' she replied.

'And you will let me come once in a while? You can't think what the rest-house is. Those drummers will kill me yet. And the coolies at the dam are not in my set.'

'Well, since you're here. But you ought *not* to be here. Do me a real kindness, and go away, Nick.'

'Give me an easier one.'

'But *why* are you here? You can't show any rational reason.'

'Yes; that's what the British Government says. But I brought my reason along.'

He confessed his longing for something homely and natural and American after a day's work under a heathen and raging sun; and when he put it in this light, Kate responded on another side. She had been brought up with a sense of responsibility for making young men feel at home; and he certainly felt at home when she was able to produce, two or three evenings later, a Topaz paper sent her by her father. Tarvin pounced on it, and turned the flimsy four pages inside out, and then back again.

He smacked his lips. 'Oh, good, good, *good*!' he murmured relishingly. 'Don't the advertisements look nice? What's the matter with Topaz?' cried he, holding the sheet from him at arm's length, and gazing ravenously up and down its

columns. 'Oh, *she's* all right.' The cooing, musical sing-song in which he uttered this consecrated phrase was worth going a long way to hear. 'Say, we're coming on, aren't we? We're not lagging nor loafing, nor fooling our time away, if we *haven't* got the Three C.'s *yet*. We're keeping up with the procession. Hi-yi! look at the "Rustler Rootlets"—just about a stickful! Why, the poor old worm-eaten town is going sound, sound asleep in her old age, isn't she? Think of taking a railroad there! Listen to this:—

'"Milo C. Lambert, the owner of 'Lambert's Last Ditch,' has a car-load of good ore on the dump, but, like all the rest of us, don't find it pays to ship without a railroad line nearer than fifteen miles. Milo says Colorado won't be good enough for him after he gets his ore away."

'I should think not. Come to Topaz, Milo! And this:—

'"When the Three C.'s comes into the city in the fall we shan't be hearing this talk about hard times. Meantime it's an injustice to the town, which all honest citizens should resent and do their best to put down, to speak of Rustler as taking a back seat to any town of its age in the State. As a matter of fact, Rustler was never more prosperous.

With mines which produced last year ore valued at a total of $1,200,000, with six churches of different denominations, with a young but prosperous and growing academy which is destined to take a front rank among American schools, with a record of new buildings erected during the past year equal if not superior to any town in the mountains, and with a population of lively and determined business men, Rustler bids fair in the coming year to be worthy of her name."

'Who said "afraid"? We're not hurt. Hear us whistle. But I'm sorry Heckler let that into his correspondence,' he added, with a momentary frown. 'Some of our Topaz citizens might miss the fun of it, and go over to Rustler to wait for the Three C.'s. Coming in the fall, is it? Oh, dear! Oh, dear, dear, dear! This is the way they amuse themselves while they dangle their legs over Big Chief Mountain and wait for it:—

'"Our merchants have responded to the recent good feeling which has pervaded the town since word came that President Mutrie, on his return to Denver, was favourably considering the claims of Rustler. Robbins has his front windows prettily decorated and filled with fancy articles. His store

seems to be the most popular for the youngsters who have a nickel or two to spend."

'I should murmur! Won't you like to see the Three C.'s come sailing into Topaz one of these fine mornings, little girl?' asked Tarvin suddenly, as he seated himself on the sofa beside her, and opened out the paper so that she could look over his shoulder.

'Would you like it, Nick?'

'*Would* I!'

'Then, of course, I should. But I think you will be better off if it doesn't. It will make you too rich. See father.'

'Well, I'd put on the brakes if I found myself getting real rich. I'll stop just after I've passed the Genteel Poverty Station. Isn't it good to see the old heading again—Heckler's name as large as life just under "oldest paper in Divide County," and Heckler's fist sticking out all over a rousing editorial on the prospects of the town? Home-like, isn't it? He's got two columns of new advertising; that shows what the town's doing. And look at the good old "ads." from the Eastern agencies. How they take you back! I never expected to thank Heaven for a Castoria advertisement; did you, Kate? But I swear it makes me feel good all over. I'll read the patent inside if you say much.'

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Kate smiled. The paper gave her a little pang of home-sickness too. She had her own feeling for Topaz; but what reached her through the *Telegram's* lively pages was the picture of her mother sitting in her kitchen in the long afternoons (she had sat in the kitchen so long in the poor and wandering days of the family that she did it now by preference), gazing sadly out at white-topped Big Chief, and wondering what her daughter was doing at that hour. Kate remembered well that afternoon hour in the kitchen when the work was done. She recalled from the section-house days the superannuated rocker, once a parlour chair, which her mother had hung with skins and told off for kitchen service. Kate remembered with starting tears that her mother had always wanted her to sit in it, and how good it had been to see from her own hassock next the oven the little mother swallowed up in its deeps. She heard the cat purring under the stove, and the kettle singing; the clock ticked in her ear, and the cracks between the boards in the floor of the hastily built section-house blew the cold prairie air against her heels.

She gazed over Tarvin's shoulder at the two cuts of Topaz which appeared in every issue of the *Telegram*—the one representing the town in its first year, the other the town of to-day—and a lump rose in her throat.

'Quite a difference, isn't there?' said Tarvin, following her eye. 'Do you remember where your father's tent used to stand, and the old section-house, just here by the river?' He pointed, and Kate nodded without speaking. 'Those were good days, weren't they? Your father wasn't as rich as he is now, and neither was I; but we were all mighty happy together.'

Kate's thought drifted back to that time, and called up other visions of her mother expending her slight frame in many forms of hard work. The memory of the little characteristic motion with which she would shield with raised hand the worn young old face when she would be broiling above an open fire, or frying doughnuts, or lifting the stove lid, forced her to gulp down the tears. The simple picture was too clear, even to the light of the fire on the face, and the pink light shining through the frail hand.

'Hello!' said Tarvin, casting his eye up and down the columns, 'they've had to put another team on to keep the streets clean. We had one. Heckler don't forget the climate either. And they are doing well at the Mesa House. That's a good sign. The tourists will all have to stop over at Topaz when the new line comes through, and we have the right hotel. Some towns might think we had a little tourist traffic now. Here's Loomis

dining fifty at the Mesa the other day—through express. They've formed a new syndicate to work the Hot Springs. Do you know, I shouldn't wonder if they made a town down there. Heckler's right. It *will* help Topaz. We don't mind a town that near. It makes a suburb of it.'

He marked his sense of the concession implied in letting him stay that evening by going early; but he did not go so early on the following evening, and as he showed no inclination to broach forbidden subjects, Kate found herself glad to have him there, and it became a habit of his to drop in, in the evenings, and to join the group that gathered, with open doors and windows, about the family lamp. In the happiness of seeing visible effects from her labours blossoming under her eyes, Kate regarded his presence less and less. Sometimes she would let him draw her out upon the veranda under the sumptuous Indian night—nights when the heat-lightning played like a drawn sword on the horizon, and the heavens hovered near the earth, and the earth was very still. But commonly they sat within, with the missionary and his wife, talking of Topaz, of the hospital, of the Maharaj Kunwar, of the dam, and sometimes of the Estes children at Bangor. For the most part, however, when the talk was among the group, it fell upon

the infinitesimal gossip of a sequestered life, to the irritation and misery of Tarvin.

When the conversation lagged in these deeps he would fetch up violently with a challenge to Estes on the subject of the tariff or silver legislation, and after that the talk was at least lively. Tarvin was, by his training, largely a newspaper-educated man. But he had also been taught at first hand by life itself, and by the habit of making his own history; and he used the hairy fist of horse-sense in dealing with the theories of newspaper politics and the systems of the schools.

Argument had no allurements for him, however; it was with Kate that he talked when he could, and oftenest, of late, of the hospital, since her progress there had begun to encourage her. She yielded at last to his entreaties to be allowed to see this paragon, and to look for himself upon the reforms she had wrought.

Matters had greatly improved since the days of the lunatic and the 'much-esteemed woman,' but only Kate knew how much remained to be done. The hospital was at least clean and sweet if she inspected it every day, and the people in their fashion were grateful for kinder tending and more skilful treatment than they had hitherto dreamed of. Upon each cure a rumour went abroad through the country-side of a new power in the

land, and other patients came; or the convalescent herself would bring back a sister, a child, or a mother with absolute faith in the power of the White Fairy to make all whole. They could not know all the help that Kate brought in the train of her quiet movements, but for what they knew they blessed her as they lay. Her new energy swept even Dhunpat Rai along the path of reform. He became curious in the limewashing of stonework, the disinfecting of wards, the proper airing of bed-linen, and even the destruction by fire of the bedsteads, once his perquisite, on which small-pox patients had died. Native-like, he worked best for a woman with the knowledge that there was an energetic white man in the background. Tarvin's visit, and a few cheery words addressed to him by that capable outsider, supplied him with this knowledge.

Tarvin could not understand the uncouth talk of the out-patients, and did not visit the women's wards; but he saw enough to congratulate Kate unreservedly. She smiled contentedly. Mrs. Estes was sympathetic, but in no way enthusiastic; and it was good to be praised by Nick, who had found so much to blame in her project.

'It's clean and it's wholesome, little girl,' he said, peering and sniffing; 'and you've done miracles with these jellyfish. If you'd been on the

opposition ticket instead of your father I shouldn't be a member of the legislature.'

Kate never talked to him about that large part of her work which lay among the women of the Maharajah's palace. Little by little she learned her way about such portions of the pile as she was permitted to traverse. From the first she had understood that the palace was ruled by one Queen, of whom the women spoke under their breath, and whose lightest word, conveyed by the mouth of a grinning child, set the packed mazes humming. Once only had she seen this Queen, glimmering like a tiger-beetle among a pile of *kincob* cushions—a lithe, black-haired young girl, it seemed, with a voice as soft as running water at night, and with eyes that had no shadow of fear in them. She turned lazily, the jewels clinking on ankle, arm, and bosom, and looked at Kate for a long time without speaking.

'I have sent that I may see you,' she said at last. 'You have come here across the water to help these cattle?'

Kate nodded, every instinct in her revolting at the silver-tongued splendour at her feet.

'You are not married?' The Queen put her hands behind her head and looked at the painted peacocks on the ceiling.

Kate did not reply, but her heart was hot.

'Is there any sickness here?' she asked at last sharply. 'I have much to do.'

'There is none, unless it may be that you yourself are sick. There are those who sicken without knowing it.'

The eyes turned to meet Kate's, which were blazing with indignation. This woman, lapped in idleness, had struck at the life of the Maharaj Kunwar; and the horror of it was that she was younger than herself.

'*Achcha*,' said the Queen, still more slowly, watching her face. 'If you hate me so, why do you not say so? You white people love truth.'

Kate turned on her heel to leave the room. Sitabhai called her back for an instant, and, moved by some royal caprice, would have caressed her, but she fled indignant, and was careful never again to venture into that wing of the palace. None of the women there called for her services, and not once but several times, when she passed the mouth of the covered way that led to Sitabhai's apartments, she saw a little naked child flourishing a jewelled knife, and shouting round the headless carcass of a goat whose blood was flooding the white marble. 'That,' said the women, 'is the gipsy's son. He learns to kill daily. A snake is a snake, and a gipsy is a gipsy, till they are dead.'

There was no slaughter of goats, singing of

songs, or twangling of musical instruments in the wing of the palace that made itself specially Kate's own. Here lived, forgotten by the Maharajah and mocked by Sitabhai's maidens, the mother of the Maharaj Kunwar. Sitabhai had taken from her—by the dark arts of the gipsies, so the Queen's adherents said; by her own beauty and knowledge in love, they sang in the other wing of the palace—all honour and consideration due to her as the Queen Mother. There were scores of empty rooms where once there had been scores of waiting-women, and those who remained with the fallen Queen were forlorn and ill-favoured. She herself was a middle-aged woman, by Eastern standards; that is to say, she had passed twenty-five, and had never been more than ordinarily comely.

Her eyes were dull with much weeping, and her mind was full of superstitions—fears for every hour of the night and the day, and vague terrors, bred of loneliness, that made her tremble at the sound of a footfall. In the years of her prosperity she had been accustomed to perfume herself, put on her jewels, and with braided hair await the Maharajah's coming. She would still call for her jewels, attire herself as of old, and wait amid the respectful silence of her attendants till the long night gave way to the dawn, and the dawn

showed the furrows on her cheeks. Kate had seen one such vigil, and perhaps showed in her eyes the wonder that she could not repress, for the Queen Mother fawned on her timidly after the jewels had been put away, and begged her not to laugh.

'You do not understand, Miss Kate,' she pleaded. 'There is one custom in your country and another in ours; but still you are a woman, and you will know.'

'But you know that no one will come,' Kate said tenderly.

'Yes, I know; but—no, you are not a woman, only a fairy that has come across the water to help me and mine.'

Here again Kate was baffled. Except in the message sent by the Maharaj Kunwar, the Queen Mother never referred to the danger that threatened her son's life. Again and again Kate had tried to lead up to the subject—to gain some hint, at least, of the nature of the plot.

'I know nothing,' the Queen would reply. 'Here behind the curtain no one knows anything. Miss Kate, if my own women lay dead out there in the sun at noon'—she pointed downwards through the tracery of her window to the flagged path below—'I should know nothing. Of what I said I know nothing; but surely it is allowed'—she lowered her voice to a whisper—'oh, surely it

is allowed to a mother to bid another woman look to her son. He is so old now that he thinks himself a man, and wanders far, and so young that he thinks the world will do him no harm. *Ahi!* And he is so wise that he knows a thousand times more than I: he speaks English like an Englishman. How can I control him with my little learning and my very great love? I say to you, Be good to my son. That I can say aloud, and write it upon a wall, if need were. There is no harm in that. But if I said more, look you, the plaster between the stones beneath me would gape to suck it in, and the wind would blow all my words across to the villages. I am a stranger here —a Rajputni from Kulu, a thousand thousand koss away. They bore me here in a litter to be married —in the dark they bore me for a month; and except that some of my women have told me, I should not know which way the home wind blows when it goes to Kulu. What can a strange cow do in the byre? May the gods witness.'

'Ah, but tell me what you think?'

'I think nothing,' the Queen would answer sullenly. 'What have women to do with thinking? They love and they suffer. I have said all that I may say. Miss Kate, some day you will bear a little son. As you have been good to my son, so may the gods be good to yours when that time

comes, and you know how the heart is full of love.'

'If I am to protect him, I must know. You leave me in the dark.'

'And I also am in the dark—and the darkness is full of danger.'

Tarvin himself was much about the palace, not only because he perceived that it was there he might most hopefully keep his ear to the ground for news of the Naulahka, but because it enabled him to observe Kate's comings and goings, and with his hand ready for a rapid movement to his pistol-pocket.

His gaze followed her at these times, as at others, with the longing look of the lover; but he said nothing, and Kate was grateful to him. It was a time, as it seemed to him, to play the part of the Tarvin who had carried water for her long ago at the end of the section; it was a time to stand back, to watch, to guard, but not to trouble her.

The Maharaj Kunwar came often under his eye, and he was constantly inventing amusing things for him to do remote from Sitabhai's courtyard; but the boy would occasionally break away, and then it was Tarvin's task to go after him and make sure that he came to no harm. One afternoon

when he had spent some time in coaxing the child away, and had finally resorted to force, much to the child's disgust, a twelve-foot baulk of teakwood, as he was passing out under an arch in process of repair, crashed down from the scaffolding just in front of Fibby's nose. The horse retired into the courtyard on his hind legs, and Tarvin heard the rustle of the women behind the shutters.

He reflected on the incurable slackness of these people, stopped to swear at the workmen crouched on the scaffolding in the hollow of the arch, and went on. They were no less careless about the dam—it was in the blood, he supposed—for the headman of a coolie gang who must have crossed the Amet twenty times, showed him a new ford across a particularly inviting channel, which ended in a quicksand; and when Tarvin had flung himself clear, the gang spent half the day in hauling Fibby out with ropes. They could not even build a temporary bridge without leaving the boards loose, so that a horse's hoof found its way between; and the gangs seemed to make a point of letting bullock-carts run down the steep embankments into the small of Tarvin's back, when, at infrequent intervals, that happened to be turned.

Tarvin was filled with great respect for the British Government, which worked on these materials, and began to understand the mild-faced

melancholy and decisive views of Lucien Estes about the native population, as well as to sympathise more keenly than ever with Kate.

This curious people were now, he learned with horror, to fill the cup of their follies by marrying the young Maharaj Kunwar to a three-year-old babe, brought from the Kulu hills, at vast expense, to be his bride. He sought out Kate at the missionary's, and found her quivering with indignation. She had just heard.

'It's like them to waste a wedding where it isn't wanted,' said Tarvin soothingly. Since he saw Kate excited, it became his part to be calm. 'Don't worry your overworked head about it, Kate. You are trying to do too much, and you are feeling too much. You will break down before you know it, from sheer exhaustion of the chord of sympathy.'

'Oh no!' said Kate. 'I feel quite strong enough for anything that may come. I mustn't break down. Think of this marriage coming on. The Maharaj will need me more than ever. He has just told me that he won't get any sleep for three days and three nights while their priests are praying over him.'

'Crazy! Why, it's a quicker way of killing him than Sitabhai's. Heavens! I daren't think of it. Let's talk of something else. Any papers

from your father lately? This kind of thing makes Topaz taste sort of good.'

She gave him a package received by the last post, and he fell silent as he ran his eye hastily over a copy of the *Telegram* six weeks old; but he seemed to find little comfort in it. His brows knitted.

'Pshaw!' he exclaimed with irritation, 'this won't do!'

'What is it?'

'Heckler bluffing about the Three C.'s, and not doing it well. That isn't like Jim. He talks about it as a sure thing as hard as if he didn't believe in it, and had a private tip from somewhere that it wasn't coming after all. I've no doubt he has. But he needn't give it away to Rustler like that. Let's look at the real estate transfers. Ah! that tells the story,' he exclaimed excitedly, as his eye rested on the record of the sale of a parcel of lots on G Street. 'Prices are going down—away, 'way down. The boys are caving. They're giving up the fight.' He leaped up and marched about the room nervously. 'Heavens! if I could only get word to them!'

'Why—what, Nick? What word do you want to send them?'

He pulled himself up instantly.

'To let them know that *I* believe in it,' he said. 'To get them to hold on.'

'But suppose the road doesn't come to Topaz after all. How can you know, away off here in India?'

'Come to Topaz, little girl!' he shouted. 'Come to Topaz! It's coming if I have to lay the rails!'

But the news about the temper of the town vexed and disconcerted him notwithstanding, and after he left Kate that night he sent a cable to Heckler, through Mrs. Mutrie, desiring her to forward the despatch from Denver, as if that were the originating office of the message.

'Heckler, Topaz.—*Take a brace, for God's sake. Got dead cinch on Three C.'s. Trust me, and boom like* —— Tarvin.'

XIV

Because I sought it far from men,
In deserts and alone;
I found it burning overhead,
The jewel of a throne.

Because I sought—I sought it so
And spent my days to find—
It blazed one moment ere it left
The blacker night behind.

The Crystals of Iswara.

A CITY of tents had grown up in three days without the walls of Rhatore—a city greened with far-brought lawns of turf, and stuck about with hastily transplanted orange-trees, wooden lamp-posts painted in gaudy colours, and a cast-iron fountain of hideous design. Many guests were expected at Rhatore to grace the marriage of the Maharaj Kunwar—barons, princes, thakurs, lords of waste fortresses and of hopeless crags of the north and the south, fiefs from the fat, poppy-blazoned plains of Mewar, and brother-

rajahs of the King. They came accompanied by their escorts, horse and foot.

In a land where genealogies, to be respectable, must run back without a break for eight hundred years, it is a delicate matter not to offend; and all were desperately jealous of the place and precedence of their neighbours in the camp. Lest the task should be too easy, the household bards of the princes came with them, and squabbled with the court officials of Gokral Seetarun. Behind the tents stretched long lines of horse-pickets, where the fat pink-and-blue-spotted stallions neighed and squealed at one another, under their heavy velvet trappings, all day long; and the ragged militia of twenty tiny native states smoked and gambled among their saddles, or quarrelled at the daily distribution of food furnished by the generosity of the Maharajah. From hundreds of miles about, vagrant and mendicant priests of every denomination had flocked into the city, and their salmon-coloured raiment, black blankets, or ash-smeared nudity gave Tarvin many minutes of untrammelled entertainment as he watched them roaming fearlessly from tent to tent, their red eyes rolling in their heads, alternately threatening or fawning for gifts. The rest-house, as Tarvin discovered, was crammed with fresh contingents of commercial travellers. His Highness was not likely to pay at such a

season, but fresh orders would be plentiful. The city itself was brilliant with coats of pink-and-white lime-wash, and the main streets were obstructed with the bamboo scaffoldings of fireworks. Every house-front was swept and newly luted with clean mud, and the doorways were hung with marigolds and strings of jasmine-buds. Through the crowds tramped the sweating sweetmeat-dealers, vendors of hawks, dealers in cheap jewellery and glass bracelets and little English mirrors, while camels, loaded with wedding gifts of far-off kings, ploughed through the crowd, or the mace-bearers of the State cleared a path with their silver staves for the passage of the Maharajah's carriages. Forty barouches were in use, and, as long as horse-flesh held out, or harness could be patched with string, it did not beseem the dignity of the State to provide less than four horses to each. As these horses were untrained, and as the little native boys, out of sheer lightness of heart, touched off squibs and crackers at high noon, the streets were animated.

The hill on which the palace stood seemed to smoke like a volcano, for the little dignitaries came without cessation, each expecting the salute of cannon due to his rank. Between the roars of the ordnance, strains of uncouth music would break from the red walls, and presently some officer of the court would ride out of one of the gates,

followed by all his retinue, each man gorgeous as a cock-pheasant in spring, his moustache fresh oiled and curled fiercely over his ears; or one of the royal elephants, swathed in red velvet and bullion from shoulder to ankle, would roll out under the weight of his silver howdah, and trumpet till the streets were cleared for his passage. Seventy elephants were fed daily by the King—no mean charge, since each beast consumed as much green fodder daily as he could carry on his back, as well as thirty or forty pounds of flour. Now and again one of the monsters, maddened by the noise and confusion, and by the presence of strange rivals, would be overtaken with paroxysms of blind fury. Then he would be hastily stripped of his trappings, bound with ropes and iron chains, hustled out of the city between two of his fellows, and tied down half a mile away by the banks of the Amet, to scream and rage till the horses in the neighbouring camps broke their pickets and stampeded wildly among the tents. Pertab Singh, commandant of his Highness's body-guard, was in his glory. Every hour of the day gave him excuse for charging with his troop on mysterious but important errands between the palace and the tents of the princes. The formal interchange of visits alone occupied two days. Each prince with his escort would solemnly drive to the palace, and half an

hour later the silver state barouche and the Maharajah himself, jewelled from head to heel, would return the visit, while the guns gave word of the event to the city of houses and to the city of tents.

When night fell on the camp there was no silence till near the dawn, for strolling players, singers of songs, and tellers of stories, dancing girls, brawny Oudh wrestlers, and camp followers beyond counting, wandered from tent to tent making merry. When these had departed, the temples in the city sent forth the hoarse cries of conchs, and Kate, listening, seemed to hear in every blast the wail of the little Maharaj Kunwar, who was being prepared for his marriage by interminable prayers and purifications. She saw as little of the boy as Tarvin did of the King. In those days every request for an audience was met with, 'He is with his priests.' Tarvin cursed all the priests of Rhatore, and condemned to every variety of perdition the hang-dog fakirs that prowled about his path.

'I wish to goodness they'd come to a point with this fool business,' he said to himself. 'I haven't got a century to spend in Rhatore.'

After nearly a week of uninterrupted clamour, blazing sunshine, and moving crowds clad in garments, the colours of which made Tarvin's eyes ache, there arrived, by the same road that had

borne Kate to the city, two carriages containing five Englishmen and three Englishwomen, who, later, walked about the city with lack-lustre eyes, bored by the official duty which compelled them to witness in the hot weather a crime which it was not only beyond them to hinder, but to which they were obliged to lend their official patronage.

The agent to the Governor-General—that is to say, the official representative of the Viceroy in Rajputana—had some time before represented to the Maharajah that he might range himself in the way of progress and enlightenment by ordering that his son should not be given in marriage for another ten years. The Maharajah, pleading the immemorial custom of his land and the influence of the priests, gilded his refusal by a generous donation to a woman's hospital in Calcutta which was not in want of funds.

For his own part, Tarvin could not comprehend how any government could lend its countenance to this wicked farce, calling itself a marriage, which was presently to be played out with the assistance of two children. He was presently introduced to the agent of the Governor-General, who was anxious to learn more about the damming of the Amet. To be asked about the damming of the Amet, when he was making no more progress than at present with the Naulahka, seemed to Tarvin,

however, the last touch of insult, and he was not communicative, asking the agent, instead, a number of urgent questions about the approaching infamy at the palace. The agent declaring the marriage to be a political necessity, the destination suggested by Tarvin for political necessities of this sort caused the official to stiffen, and to look this wild American up and down with startled curiosity. They parted on poor terms.

With the rest of the party Tarvin was more at ease. The agent's wife, a tall brunette, belonging to one of those families which from the earliest days of the East India Company have administered the fortunes of India, solemnly inspected Kate's work at the hospital; and being only a woman, and not an official, was attracted, and showed that she was attracted, by the sad-eyed little woman who did not talk about her work. Therefore Tarvin devoted himself to the amusement and entertainment of the agent's wife, and she pronounced him an extraordinary person. 'But, then, all Americans are extraordinary, you know, though they're so clever.'

Not forgetting in the midst of this tumultuous pageant that he was a citizen of Topaz, Tarvin told her about that blessed city of the plain, away off there under the Sauguache Range, where half his heart lay. He called it 'the magic city,'

implying that the dwellers of the Western continent had agreed to call it so by general consent. She was not bored; she enjoyed it. Talk of land and improvement companies, boards of trade, town lots, and the Three C.'s was fresh to her, and it became easy to lead up to what Tarvin actually had in mind. What about the Naulahka? Had she ever seen it? He asked these questions boldly.

No; she knew nothing of the Naulahka. Her thoughts were bounded by the thought of going home in the spring. Home for her meant a little house near Surbiton, close to the Crystal Palace, where her three-year-old boy was waiting for her; and the interests of the other English men and women seemed equally remote from Rajputana—not to mention the Naulahka. It was only inferentially that Tarvin could gather that they had spent the greater part of their working lives within the limits of the country. They talked as gipsies might talk by the roadside a little before the horses are put into the caravan. The ways were hot, they implied, and very dusty; and they hoped one day to be able to rest. The wedding was only one more weary incident on the line of march, and they devoutly wished it over. One of them even envied Tarvin for coming to the State with his fresh eye and his lively belief in the possibility of getting something out of the land beside a harvest of regrets.

The last day of the marriage ceremonies began and ended with more cannon, more fireworks, more clattering of hoofs, more trumpeting of elephants, and with the clamour of bands trying to play 'God Save the Queen.' The Maharaj Kunwar was to appear in the evening (in an Indian state wedding the bride is neither mentioned nor seen) at a banquet, where the agent of the Governor-General would propose his health and that of his father. The Maharaj was to make a speech in his best English. A court scribe had already composed a long oration to be used by his father. Tarvin was beginning seriously to doubt whether he should ever see the child alive again; and, before the banquet, rode out into the seething city to reconnoitre. It was twilight, and the torches were flaring between the houses. Wild outlanders from the desert, who had never seen a white man before, caught his horse by the bridle, examined him curiously, and with a grunt let him pass. The many-coloured turbans showed under the flickering light like the jewels of a broken necklace, and all the white housetops were crowded with the veiled figures of women. In half an hour the Maharaj Kunwar would make his way from the royal temple to the banqueting-tent at the head of a procession of caparisoned elephants.

Tarvin forced his way inch by inch through the

dense crowd that waited at the foot of the temple steps. He merely wished to satisfy himself that the child was well; he wanted to see him come from the temple. As he looked about him he saw that he was the only white man in the crowd, and pitied his jaded acquaintances, who could find no pleasure in the wild scene under his eyes.

The temple doors were closed, and the torch-light flashed back from the ivory and silver with which they were inlaid. Somewhere out of sight stood the elephants, for Tarvin could hear their deep breathing and an occasional squeal above the hum of the crowd. Half a troop of cavalry, very worn and dusty with the day's labours, were trying to clear an open space before the temple, but they might as well have tried to divide a rainbow. From the roofs of the houses the women were throwing flowers, sweetmeats, and coloured rice into the crowd, while small bards, not yet attached to the house of any prince, chanted aloud in praise of the Maharajah, the Maharaj Kunwar, the Viceroy, the agent of the Governor-General, Colonel Nolan, and any one else who might possibly reward praise with pence. One of these men, recognising Tarvin, struck up a chant in his honour. He had come, said the song, from a far country to dam an ungovernable river, and fill the country-side with gold; his step was like the step

of a dromedary in the spring; his eye terrible as that of an elephant; and the graces of his person such that the hearts of all the women of Rhatore turned to water when he rode upon the public way. Lastly, he would reward the singer of this poor song with untold generosity, and his name and fame should endure in the land so long as the flag of Gokral Seetarun had five colours, or as long as the Naulahka adorned the throat of kings.

Then, with an ear-splitting shriek of conchs, the temple doors opened inward, and the voices of the crowd were hushed into a whisper of awe. Tarvin's hands tightened on the reins of his horse, and he leaned forward to stare. The opened doors of the temples framed a square of utter darkness, and to the screeching of the conchs was added a throbbing of innumerable drums. A breath of incense, strong enough to make him cough, drifted across the crowd, which were absolutely silent now.

The next moment the Maharaj Kunwar, alone and unattended, came out of the darkness, and stood in the torchlight with his hands on the hilt of his sword. The face beneath the turban, draped with loops of diamonds under an emerald aigrette, was absolutely colourless. There were purple circles about his eyes, and his mouth was half

open; but the pity Tarvin felt for the child's weariness was silenced by a sudden thrill and leap of his heart, for on the gold cloth of the Maharaj Kunwar's breast lay the Naulahka.

There was no need, this time, to ask any questions. It was not he who saw it; its great deep eyes seemed to fall on him. It blazed with the dull red of the ruby, the angry green of the emerald, the cold blue of the sapphire, and the white, hot glory of the diamond. But dulling all these glories was the superb radiance of one gem that lay above the great carved emerald on the central clasp. It was the black diamond—black as the pitch of the infernal lake, and lighted from below with the fires of hell.

The thing lay on the boy's shoulders, a yoke of flame. It outshone the silent Indian stars above, turned the tossing torches to smears of dull yellow, and sucked the glitter from the cloth of gold on which it lay.

There was no time to think, to estimate, to appraise, scarcely a moment even to realise, for the conchs suddenly wailed again, the Maharaj stepped back into the darkness, and the doors of the temple were shut.

XV

From small-pox and the Evil Eye, a wasteful marriage-feast, and the kindness of my co-wife, may the Gods protect my son.—*Hindu Proverb.*

TARVIN made his way to the banquet with his face aflame and his tongue dry between his teeth. He had seen it. It existed. It was not a myth. And he would have it; he would take it back with him. Mrs. Mutrie should hang it about the sculptured neck that looked so well when she laughed; and the Three C.'s should come to Topaz. He would be the saviour of his town; the boys at home would take the horses out of his carriage and drag him up Pennsylvania Avenue with their own hands; and town lots would sell next year in Topaz by the running inch.

It was worth all the waiting, worth the damming of a hundred rivers, worth a century of pachisi playing, and a thousand miles of bullock-cart. As he drained a glass to the health of the young

Maharaj Kunwar at the banquet that evening, he renewed his pledge to himself to fight it out on this line if it took all summer. His pride of success had lain low of late, and taken many hurts; but now that he had seen his prize he esteemed it already within his grasp, as he had argued at Topaz that Kate must be his because he loved her.

Next morning he woke with a confused notion that he stood on the threshold of great deeds; and then, in his bath, he wondered whence he had plucked the certainty and exultation of the night before. He had, indeed, seen the Naulahka. But the temple doors had closed on the vision. He found himself asking whether either temple or necklace had been real, and in the midst of his wonder and excitement was half way to the city before he knew that he had left the rest-house. When he came to himself, however, he knew well whither he was going and what he was going for. If he had seen the Naulahka, he meant to keep it in sight. It had disappeared into the temple. To the temple, therefore, he would go.

Fragments of burnt-out torches lay on the temple steps among trampled flowers and spilt oil, and the marigold garlands hung limp and wilted on the fat shoulders of the black stone bulls that guarded the inner court. Tarvin took off his white pith helmet (it was very hot, though it was

only two hours after dawn), pushed back the scanty hair from his high forehead, and surveyed the remnants of yesterday's feast. The city was still asleep after its holiday. The doors of the building were wide open, and he ascended the steps and walked in, with none to hinder.

The formless, four-faced god Iswara, standing in the centre of the temple, was smeared and discoloured with stains of melted butter, and the black smoke of exhausted incense. Tarvin looked at the figure curiously, half expecting to find the Naulahka hung about one of its four necks. Behind him, in the deeper gloom of the temple, stood other divinities, many-handed and many-headed, tossing their arms aloft, protruding their tongues, and grinning at one another. The remains of many sacrifices lay about them, and in the half light Tarvin could see that the knees of one were dark with dried blood. Overhead the dark roof ran up into a Hindu dome, and there was a soft rustle and scratching of nesting bats.

Tarvin, with his hat on the back of his head and his hands in his pockets, gazed at the image, looking about him and whistling softly. He had been a month in India, but he had not yet penetrated to the interior of a temple. Standing there, he recognised with fresh force how entirely the life, habits, and traditions of this strange people alien-

ated them from all that seemed good and right to him; and he was vaguely angered to know that it was the servants of these horrors who possessed a necklace which had power to change the destiny of a Christian and civilised town like Topaz.

He knew that he would be expelled without ceremony for profanation, if discovered, and made haste to finish his investigations, with a half-formed belief that the slovenliness of the race might have caused them to leave the Naulahka about somewhere, as a woman might leave her jewels on her dressing-table after a late return from a ball the night before. He peered about and under the gods, one by one, while the bats squeaked above him. Then he returned to the central image of Iswara, and in his former attitude regarded the idol.

It occurred to him that, though he was on level ground, most of his weight was resting on his toes, and he stepped back to recover his balance. The slab of sandstone he had just quitted rolled over slowly, as a porpoise rolls in the still sea, revealing for an instant a black chasm below. Then it shouldered up into its place again without a sound, and Tarvin wiped the cold sweat from his forehead. If he had found the Naulahka at that instant he would have smashed it in pure rage. He went out into the sunlight once more,

devoting the country where such things were possible to its own gods; he could think of nothing worse.

A priest, sprung from an unguessable retreat, came out of the temple immediately afterward, and smiled upon him.

Tarvin, willing to renew his hold on the wholesome world in which there were homes and women, betook himself to the missionary's cottage, where he invited himself to breakfast. Mr. and Mrs. Estes had kept themselves strictly aloof from the marriage ceremony, but they could enjoy Tarvin's account of it, delivered from the Topaz point of view. Kate was unfeignedly glad to see him. She was full of the discreditable desertion of Dhunpat Rai and the hospital staff from their posts. They had all gone to watch the wedding festivities, and for three days had not appeared at the hospital. The entire work of the place had devolved on herself and the wild woman of the desert who was watching her husband's cure. Kate was very tired, and her heart was troubled with misgivings for the welfare of the little Prince, which she communicated to Tarvin when he drew her out upon the veranda after breakfast.

'I'm sure he wants absolute rest now,' she said, almost tearfully. 'He came to me at the end of the dinner last night—I was in the women's wing

of the palace—and cried for half an hour. Poor little baby! It's cruel.'

'Oh, well, he'll be resting to-day. Don't worry.'

'No; to-day they take his bride back to her own people again, and he has to drive out with the procession or something—in this sun, too. It's very wicked. Doesn't it ever make your head ache, Nick? I sometimes think of you sitting out on that dam of yours, and wonder how you can bear it.'

'I can bear a good deal for you, little girl,' returned Tarvin, looking down into her eyes.

'Why, how is that for me, Nick?'

'You'll see if you live long enough,' he assured her; but he was not anxious to discuss his dam, and returned to the safer subject of the Maharaj Kunwar.

Next day and the day after he rode aimlessly about in the neighbourhood of the temple, not caring to trust himself within its walls again, but determined to keep his eye upon the first and last spot where he had seen the Naulahka. There was no chance at present of getting speech with the only living person, save the King, whom he definitely knew had touched the treasure. It was maddening to await the reappearance of the Maharaj Kunwar in his barouche, but he

summoned what patience he could. He hoped much from him; but meanwhile he often looked in at the hospital to see how Kate fared. The traitor Dhunpat Rai and his helpers had returned; but the hospital was crowded with cases from the furthest portions of the State—fractures caused by the King's reckless barouches, and one or two cases, new in Kate's experience, of men drugged, under the guise of friendship, for the sake of the money they carried with them, and left helpless in the public ways.

Tarvin, as he cast his shrewd eye about the perfectly kept men's ward, humbly owned to himself that, after all, she was doing better work in Rhatore than he. She at least did not run a hospital to cover up deeper and darker designs, and she had the inestimable advantage over him of having her goal in sight. It was not snatched from her after one maddening glimpse; it was not the charge of a mysterious priesthood, or of an impalpable State; it was not hidden in treacherous temples, nor hung round the necks of vanishing infants.

One morning, before the hour at which he usually set out for the dam, Kate sent a note over to him at the rest-house asking him to call at the hospital as soon as possible. For one rapturous moment he dreamed of impossible things. But

smiling bitterly at his readiness to hope, he lighted a cigar, and obeyed the order.

Kate met him on the steps, and led him into the dispensary.

She laid an eager hand on his arm. 'Do you know anything about the symptoms of hemp-poisoning?' she asked him.

He caught her by both hands quickly, and stared wildly into her face. 'Why? Why? Has any one been daring——?'

She laughed nervously. 'No, no. It isn't me. It's him.'

'Who?'

'The Maharaj—the child. I'm certain of it now.' She went on to tell him how, that morning, the barouche, the escort, and a pompous native had hurried up to the missionary's door bearing the almost lifeless form of the Maharaj Kunwar; how she had at first attributed the attack, whatever it might be, to exhaustion consequent upon the wedding festivities; how the little one had roused from his stupor, blue-lipped and hollow-eyed, and had fallen from one convulsion into another, until she had begun to despair; and how, at the last, he had dropped into a deep sleep of exhaustion, when she had left him in the care of Mrs. Estes. She added that Mrs. Estes had believed that the young prince

was suffering from a return of his usual malady; she had seen him in paroxysms of this kind twice before Kate came.

'Now look at this,' said Kate, taking down the chart of her hospital cases, on which were recorded the symptoms and progress of two cases of hemp-poisoning that had come to her within the past week.

'These men,' she said, 'had been given sweet-meats by a gang of travelling gipsies, and all their money was taken from them before they woke up. Read for yourself.'

Tarvin read, biting his lips. At the end he looked up at her sharply.

'Yes,' he said, with an emphatic nod of his head—'yes. Sitabhai?'

'Who else would dare?' answered Kate passionately.

'I know. I know. But how to stop her going on! how to bring it home to her!'

'Tell the Maharajah,' responded Kate decidedly.

Tarvin took her hand. 'Good! I'll try it. But there's no shadow of proof, you know.'

'No matter. Remember the boy. Try. I must go back to him now.'

The two returned to the house of the missionary together, saying very little on the way. Tarvin's indignation that Kate should be mixed up in this miserable business almost turned to anger at Kate

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herself, as he rode beside her; but his wrath was extinguished at sight of the Maharaj Kunwar. The child lay on a bed in an inner room at the missionary's, almost too weak to turn his head. As Kate and Tarvin entered, Mrs. Estes rose from giving him his medicine, said a word to Kate by way of report, and returned to her own work. The child was clothed only in a soft muslin coat; but his sword and jewelled belt lay across his feet.

'Salaam, Tarvin Sahib,' he murmured. 'I am very sorry that I was ill.'

Tarvin bent over him tenderly. 'Don't try to talk, little one.'

'Nay; I am well now,' was the answer. 'Soon we will go riding together.'

'Were you very sick, little man?'

'I cannot tell. It is all dark to me. I was in the palace laughing with some of the dance-girls. Then I fell. And after that I remember no more till I came here.'

He gulped down the cooling draught that Kate gave him, and resettled himself on the pillows, while one wax-yellow hand played with the hilt of his sword. Kate was kneeling by his side, one arm under the pillow supporting his head; and it seemed to Tarvin that he had never before done justice to the beauty latent in her good, plain,

strong features. The trim little figure took softer outlines, the firm mouth quivered, the eyes were filled with a light that Tarvin had never seen before.

'Come to the other side—so,' said the child, beckoning Tarvin in the native fashion, by folding all his tiny fingers into his palms rapidly and repeatedly. Tarvin knelt obediently on the other side of the couch. 'Now I am a king, and this is my court.'

Kate laughed musically in her delight at seeing the boy recovering strength. Tarvin slid his arm under the pillow, found Kate's hand there, and held it.

The portière at the door of the room dropped softly. Mrs. Estes had stolen in for a moment, and imagined that she saw enough to cause her to steal out again. She had been thinking a great deal since the days when Tarvin first introduced himself.

The child's eyes began to grow dull and heavy, and Kate would have withdrawn her arm to give him another draught.

'Nay; stay so,' he said imperiously; and relapsing into the vernacular, muttered thickly—'Those who serve the King shall not lack their reward. They shall have villages free of tax—three, five villages; Sujjain, Amet, and Gungra.

Let it be entered as a free gift when they marry. They shall marry, and be about me always—Miss Kate and Tarvin Sahib.'

Tarvin did not understand why Kate's hand was withdrawn swiftly. He did not know the vernacular as she did.

'He is getting delirious again,' said Kate, under her breath. 'Poor, poor little one!'

Tarvin ground his teeth, and cursed Sitabhai between them. Kate was wiping the damp forehead, and trying to still the head as it was thrown restlessly from side to side. Tarvin held the child's hands, which closed fiercely on his own, as the boy was racked and convulsed by the last effects of the hemp.

For some minutes he fought and writhed, calling upon the names of many gods, striving to reach his sword, and ordering imaginary regiments to hang those white dogs to the beams of the palace gate, and to smoke them to death.

Then the crisis passed, and he began to talk to himself and to call for his mother.

The vision of a little grave dug in the open plain sloping to the river, where they had laid out the Topaz cemetery, rose before Tarvin's memory. They were lowering Heckler's first baby into it, in its pine coffin; and Kate, standing by the grave-side, was writing the child's name on the finger's

length of smoothed pine which was to be its only headstone.

'Nay, nay, nay!' wailed the Maharaj Kunwar. 'I am speaking the truth; and oh, I was so tired at that pagal dance in the temple, and I only crossed the courtyard. . . . It was a new girl from Lucknow; she sang the song of "The Green Pulse of Mundore." . . . Yes; but only some almond curd. I was hungry, too. A little white almond curd, mother. Why should I not eat when I feel inclined? Am I a sweeper's son, or a prince? Pick me up! pick me up! It is very hot inside my head. . . . Louder. I do not understand. Will they take me over to Kate? She will make all well. What was the message?' The child began to wring his hands despairingly. 'The message! The message! I have forgotten the message. No one in the State speaks English as I speak English. But I have forgotten the message.

> 'Tiger, tiger, burning bright
> In the forests of the night,
> What immortal hand or eye
> Framed thy fearful symmetry?

Yes, mother; till she cries. I am to say the whole of it till she cries. I will not forget. I did not forget the first message. By the great god Har! I have forgotten this message.' And he began to cry.

Kate, who had watched so long by bedsides of pain, was calm and strong; she soothed the child, speaking to him in a low, quieting voice, administering a sedative draught, doing the right thing, as Tarvin saw, surely and steadily, undisturbed. It was he who was shaken by the agony that he could not alleviate.

The Maharaj Kunwar drew a long, sobbing breath, and contracted his eyebrows.

'*Mahadeo ki jai!*' he shouted. 'It has come back. A gipsy has done this. A gipsy has done this. And I was to say it until she cried.'

Kate half rose, with an awful look at Tarvin. He returned it, and, nodding, strode from the room, dashing the tears from his eyes.

XVI

Heart of my heart, is it meet or wise
To warn a King of his enemies?
We know what Heaven or Hell may bring,
But no man knoweth the mind of the King.

The Ballad of the King's Jest.

'WANT to see the Maharajah.'

'He cannot be seen.'

'I shall wait until he comes.'

'He will not be seen all day.'

'Then I shall wait all day.'

Tarvin settled himself comfortably in his saddle, and drew up in the centre of the courtyard, where he was wont to confer with the Maharajah.

The pigeons were asleep in the sunlight, and the little fountain was talking to itself, as a pigeon coos before settling to its nest. The white marble flagging glared like hot iron, and waves of heat flooded him from the green-shaded walls. The guardian of the gate tucked himself up in his sheet again and slept. And with him slept, as it seemed,

the whole world in a welter of silence as intense as the heat. Tarvin's horse champed his bit, and the echoes of the ringing iron tinkled from side to side of the courtyard. The man himself whipped a silk handkerchief round his neck as some slight protection against the peeling sunbeams, and, scorning the shade of the archway, waited in the open that the Maharajah might see there was an urgency in his visit.

In a few minutes there crept out of the stillness a sound like the far-off rustle of wind across a wheat-field on a still autumn day. It came from behind the green shutters, and with its coming Tarvin mechanically straightened himself in the saddle. It grew, died down again, and at last remained fixed in a continuous murmur, for which the ear strained uneasily — such a murmur as heralds the advance of a loud racing tide in a nightmare, when the dreamer cannot flee nor declare his terror in any voice but a whisper. After the rustle came the smell of jasmine and musk that Tarvin knew well.

The palace wing had wakened from its afternoon siesta, and was looking at him with a hundred eyes. He felt the glances that he could not see, and they filled him with wrath as he sat immovable, while the horse swished at the flies. Somebody behind the shutters yawned a polite little yawn.

Tarvin chose to regard it as an insult, and resolved to stay where he was till he or the horse dropped. The shadow of the afternoon sun crept across the courtyard inch by inch, and wrapped him at last in stifling shade.

There was a muffled hum—quite distinct from the rustle—of voices within the palace. A little ivory inlaid door opened, and the Maharajah rolled into the courtyard. He was in the ugliest muslin undress, and his little saffron-coloured Rajput turban was set awry on his head, so that the emerald plume tilted drunkenly. His eyes were red with opium, and he walked as a bear walks when he is overtaken by the dawn in the poppy-field, where he has gorged his fill through the night watches.

Tarvin's face darkened at the sight, and the Maharajah, catching the look, bade his attendants stand back out of earshot.

'Have you been waiting long, Tarvin Sahib?' he asked huskily, with an air of great good-will. 'You know I see no man at this afternoon hour, and—and they did not bring me the news.'

'I can wait,' said Tarvin composedly.

The King seated himself in the broken Windsor chair, which was splitting in the heat, and eyed Tarvin suspiciously.

'Have they given you enough convicts from

the jails? Why are you not on the dam, then, instead of breaking my rest? By God! is a King to have no peace because of you and such as you?'

Tarvin let this outburst go by without comment.

'I have come to you about the Maharaj Kunwar,' he said quietly.

'What of him?' said the Maharajah quickly. 'I—I—have not seen him for some days.'

'Why?' asked Tarvin bluntly.

'Affairs of state and urgent political necessity,' murmured the King, evading Tarvin's wrathful eyes. 'Why should I be troubled by these things, when I know that no harm has come to the boy?'

'No harm!'

'How could harm arrive?' The voice dropped into an almost conciliatory whine. 'You yourself, Tarvin Sahib, promised to be his true friend. That was on the day you rode so well, and stood so well against my bodyguard. Never have I seen such riding, and *therefore* why should I be troubled? Let us drink.'

He beckoned to his attendants. One of them came forward with a long silver tumbler concealed beneath his flowing garments, and poured into it an allowance of liqueur brandy that made Tarvin, used to potent drinks, open his eyes. The second man produced a bottle of champagne, opened it

with a skill born of long practice, and filled up the tumbler with the creaming wine.

The Maharajah drank deep, and wiped the foam from his beard, saying apologetically—'Such things are not for political agents to see; but you, Sahib, are true friend of the State. Therefore I let you see. Shall they mix you one like this?'

'Thanks. I didn't come here to drink. I came to tell you that the Maharaj has been very ill.'

'I was told there was a little fever,' said the King, leaning back in his chair. 'But he is with Miss Sheriff, and she will make all well. Just a little fever, Tarvin Sahib. Drink with me.'

'A little hell! Can you understand what I am saying? The little chap has been half poisoned.'

'Then it was the English medicines,' said the Maharajah, with a bland smile. 'Once they made me very sick, and I went back to the native hakims. You are always making funny talks, Tarvin Sahib.'

With a mighty effort Tarvin choked down his rage, and tapped his foot with his riding-whip, speaking very clearly and distinctly—'I haven't come here to make funny talk to-day. The little chap is with Miss Sheriff now. He was driven over there; and somebody in the palace has been trying to poison him with hemp.'

'Bhang!' said the Maharajah stupidly.

'I don't know what you call the mess, but he has been poisoned. But for Miss Sheriff he would have died—your first son would have died. He has been poisoned—do you hear, Maharajah Sahib? —and by some one in the palace.'

'He has eaten something bad, and it has made him sick,' said the King surlily. 'Little boys eat anything. By God! no man would dare to lay a finger on my son.'

'What would you do to prevent it?'

The Maharajah half rose to his feet, and his red eyes filled with fury. 'I would tie him to the forefoot of my biggest elephant, and kill him through an afternoon!' Then he relapsed, foaming, into the vernacular, and poured out a list of the hideous tortures that were within his will but not in his power to inflict. 'I would do all these things to any man who touched him,' he concluded.

Tarvin smiled incredulously.

'I know what you think,' stormed the King, maddened by the liquor and the opium. 'You think that because there is an English government I can make trials only by law, and all that nonsense. Stuff! What do I care for the law that is in books? Will the walls of my palace tell anything that I do?'

'They won't. If they did, they might let you

know that it is a woman inside the palace who is at the bottom of this.'

The Maharajah's face turned grey under its brown. Then he burst forth anew, almost huskily —'Am I a king or a potter that I must have the affairs of my zenana dragged into the sunlight by any white dog that chooses to howl at me? Go out, or the guard will drive you out like a jackal.'

'That's all right,' said Tarvin calmly. 'But what has it to do with the Prince, Maharajah Sahib? Come over to Mr. Estes's and I'll show you. You've had some experience of drugs, I suppose. You can decide for yourself. The boy has been poisoned.'

'It was an accursed day for my State when I first allowed the missionaries to come, and a worse day when I did not drive you out.'

'Not in the least. I'm here to look after the Maharaj Kunwar, and I'm going to do it. You prefer leaving him to be killed by your women.'

'Tarvin Sahib, do you know what you say?'

'Shouldn't be saying it if I didn't. I have all the proof in my hands.'

'But when there is a poisoning there are no proofs of any kind, least of all when a woman poisons! One does justice on suspicion, and by the English law it is a most illiberal policy to kill on suspicion. Tarvin Sahib, the English have taken

away from me everything that a Rajput desires, and I and the others are rolling in idleness like horses that never go to exercise. But at least I am master *there*!'

He waved a hand toward the green shutters, and spoke in a lower key, dropping back into his chair, and closing his eyes.

Tarvin looked at him despairingly.

'No one man would dare—no man would dare,' murmured the Maharajah more faintly. 'And as for the other thing that you spoke of, it is not in your power. By God! I am a Rajput and a king. I do not talk of the life behind the curtain.'

Then Tarvin took his courage in both hands and spoke.

'I don't want you to talk,' he said; 'I merely want to warn you against Sitabhai. She's poisoning the Prince.'

The Maharajah shuddered. That a European should mention the name of his queen was in itself sufficient insult, and one beyond all his experience. But that a European should cry aloud in the open courtyard a charge such as Tarvin had just made surpassed imagination. The Maharajah had just come from Sitabhai, who had lulled him to rest with songs and endearments sacred to him alone; and here was this lean outlander assailing her with vile charges. But for the drugs he would, in the

extremity of his rage, have fallen upon Tarvin, who was saying, 'I can prove it quite enough to satisfy Colonel Nolan.'

The Maharajah stared at Tarvin with shiny eyes, and Tarvin thought for a moment that he was going to fall in a fit; but it was the drink and the opium reasserting their power upon him. He mumbled angrily. The head fell forward, the words ceased, and he sat in his chair breathing heavily, as senseless as a log.

Tarvin gathered up his reins, and watched the sodden monarch for a long time in silence, as the rustle behind the shutters rose and fell. Then he turned to go, and rode out through the arch, thinking.

Something sprang out of the darkness where the guard slept, and where the King's fighting apes were tethered; and the horse reared as a grey ape, its chain broken at the waist-band, flung itself on the pommel of the saddle, chattering. Tarvin felt and smelt the beast. It thrust one paw into the horse's mane, and with the other encircled his own throat. Instinctively he reached back, and before the teeth under the grimy blue gums had time to close he had fired twice, pressing the muzzle of the pistol into the hide. The creature rolled off to the ground, moaning like a human being, and the smoke of the two shots drifted back through the hollow of the arch and dissolved in the open courtyard.

XVII

Strangers drawn from the ends of the earth, jewelled and plumed were we;
I was the Lord of the Inca Race, and she was the Queen of the Sea.
Under the stars beyond our stars where the reinless meteors glow,
Hotly we stormed Valhalla, a million years ago.

Dust of the stars was under our feet, glitter of stars above—
Wrecks of our wrath dropped reeling down as we fought and we spurned and we strove;
Worlds upon worlds we tossed aside, and scattered them to and fro,
The night that we stormed Valhalla, a million years ago.

She with the star I had marked for my own—I with my set desire—
Lost in the loom of the Night of Nights, 'wildered by worlds afire—
Met in a war 'twixt love and hate where the reinless meteors glow,
Hewing our way to Valhalla, a million years ago.

The Sack of the Gods.

IN summer the nights of the desert are hotter than the days, for when the sun goes down, earth, masonry, and marble give forth their stored heat, and the low clouds, promising rain and never bringing it, allow nothing to escape.

Tarvin was lying at rest in the veranda of the rest-house, smoking a cheroot and wondering how far he had bettered the case of the Maharaj Kunwar by appealing to the Maharajah. His reflections were not disturbed; the last of the commercial travellers had gone back to Calcutta and Bombay, grumbling up to the final moment of their stay, and the rest-house was all his own. Surveying his kingdom, he meditated, between the puffs of his cheroot, on the desperate and apparently hopeless condition of things. They had got to the precise point where he liked them. When a situation looked as this one did, only Nicholas Tarvin could put it through and come out on top. Kate was obdurate; the Naulahka was damnably coy; the Maharajah was ready to turn him out of the State. Sitabhai had heard him denounce her. His life was likely to come to a sudden and mysterious end, without so much as the satisfaction of knowing that Heckler and the boys would avenge him; and if it went on, it looked as though it would have to go on without Kate, and without the gift of new life to Topaz—in

other words, without being worth the trouble of living.

The moonlight, shining on the city beyond the sands, threw fantastic shadows on temple spires and the watch-towers along the walls. A dog in search of food snuffed dolefully about Tarvin's chair, and withdrew to howl at him at a distance. It was a singularly melancholy howl. Tarvin smoked till the moon went down in the thick darkness of an Indian night. She had scarcely set when he was aware of something blacker than the night between him and the horizon.

'Is it you, Tarvin Sahib?' the voice inquired in broken English.

Tarvin sprang to his feet before replying. He was beginning to be a little suspicious of fresh apparitions. His hand went to his hip pocket. Any horror, he argued, might jump out at him from the darkness in a country managed on the plan of a Kiralfy trick spectacle.

'Nay; do not be afraid,' said the voice. 'It is I—Juggut Singh.'

Tarvin pulled thoughtfully at his cigar. 'The State is full of Singhs,' he said. 'Which?'

'I, Juggut Singh, of the household of the Maharajah.'

'H'm. Does the King want to see me?'

The figure advanced a pace nearer.

'No, Sahib; the Queen.'

'Which?' repeated Tarvin.

The figure was in the veranda at his side, almost whispering in his ear. 'There is only one who would dare to leave the palace. It is the Gipsy.'

Tarvin snapped his fingers blissfully and soundlessly in the dark, and made a little click of triumph with his tongue. 'Pleasant calling hours the lady keeps,' he said.

'This is no place for speaking, Sahib. I was to say, "Come, unless you are afraid of the dark."'

'Oh, were you? Well, now, look here, Juggut; let's talk this thing out. I'd like to see your friend Sitabhai. Where are you keeping her? Where do you want me to go?'

'I was to say, "Come with me." Are you afraid?' The man spoke this time at his own prompting.

'Oh, I'm *afraid* fast enough,' said Tarvin, blowing a cloud of smoke from him. 'It isn't that.'

'There are horses—very swift horses. It is the Queen's order. Come with me.'

Tarvin smoked on, unhurrying; and when he finally picked himself out of the chair it was muscle by muscle. He drew his revolver from his pocket, turned the chambers slowly one after

another to the vague light, under Juggut Singh's watchful eye, and returned it to his pocket again, giving his companion a wink as he did so.

'Well, come on, Juggut,' he said, and they passed behind the rest-house to a spot where two horses, their heads enveloped in cloaks to prevent them from neighing, were waiting at their pickets. The man mounted one, and Tarvin took the other silently, satisfying himself before getting into the saddle that the girths were not loose this time. They left the city road at a walking pace by a cart-track leading to the hills.

'Now,' said Juggut Singh, after they had gone a quarter of a mile in this fashion, and were alone under the stars, 'we can ride.'

He bowed forward, struck his stirrups home, and began lashing his animal furiously. Nothing short of the fear of death would have made the pampered eunuch of the palace ride at this pace. Tarvin watched him roll in the saddle, chuckled a little, and followed.

'You wouldn't make much of a cow-puncher, Juggut, would you?'

'Ride!' gasped Juggut Singh. 'For the cleft between the two hills—ride!'

The dry sand flew behind their horses' hoofs, and the hot winds whistled about their ears as they headed up the easy slope toward the hills, three

miles from the palace. In the old days, before the introduction of telegraphs, the opium speculators of the desert were wont to telegraph the rise and fall in the price of the drug from little beacon-towers on the hills. It was toward one of these disused stations that Juggut Singh was straining. The horses fell into a walk as the slope grew steeper, and the outline of the squat-domed tower began to show clear against the sky. A few moments later Tarvin heard the hoofs of their horses ring on solid marble, and saw that he was riding near the edge of a great reservoir, full of water to the lip.

Eastward, a few twinkling lights in the open plain showed the position of Rhatore, and took him back to the night when he had said good-bye to Topaz from the rear platform of a Pullman. Night-fowl called to one another from the weeds at the far end of the tank, and a great fish leaped at the reflection of a star.

'The watch-tower is at the further end of the dam,' said Juggut Singh. 'The Gipsy is there.'

'Will they never have done with that name?' uttered an incomparably sweet voice out of the darkness. 'It is well that I am of a gentle temper, or the fish would know more of thee, Juggut Singh.'

Tarvin checked his horse with a jerk, for almost

under his bridle stood a figure enveloped from head to foot in a mist of pale yellow gauze. It had started up from behind the red tomb of a once famous Rajput cavalier who was supposed by the country-side to gallop nightly round the dam he had built. This was one of the reasons why the Dungar Talao was not visited after nightfall.

'Come down, Tarvin Sahib,' said the voice mockingly in English. 'I, at least, am not a grey ape. Juggut Singh, go wait with the horses below the watch-tower.'

'Yes, Juggut; and don't go to sleep,' enjoined Tarvin—'we might want you.' He alighted, and stood before the veiled form of Sitabhai.

'Shekand,' she said, after a little pause, putting out a hand that was smaller even than Kate's. 'Ah, Sahib, I knew that you would come. I knew that you were not afraid.'

She held his hand as she spoke, and pressed it tenderly. Tarvin buried the tiny hand deep in his engulfing paw, and, pressing it in a grip that made her give an involuntary cry, shook it with a hearty motion.

'Happy to make your acquaintance,' he said, as she murmured under her breath, 'By Indur, he has a hold!'

'And I am pleased to see you, too,' she

answered aloud. Tarvin noted the music of the voice. He wondered what the face behind the veil might look like.

She sat down composedly on the slab of the tomb, motioning him to a seat beside her.

'All white men like straight talk,' she said, speaking slowly, and with uncertain mastery of English pronunciation. 'Tell me, Tarvin Sahib, how much you know.'

She withdrew her veil as she spoke, and turned her face toward him. Tarvin saw that she was beautiful. The perception thrust itself insensibly between him and his other perceptions about her.

'You don't want me to give myself away, do you, Queen?'

'I do not understand. But I know you do not talk like the other white men,' she said sweetly.

'Well, then, you don't expect me to tell you the truth?'

'No,' she replied. 'Else you would tell me why you are here. Why do you give me so much trouble?'

'*Do* I trouble you?'

Sitabhai laughed, throwing back her head, and clasping her hands behind her neck. Tarvin watched her curiously in the starlight. All his senses were alert; he was keenly on his guard, and he cast a wary eye about and behind him from

time to time. But he could see nothing but the dull glimmer of the water that lapped at the foot of the marble steps, and hear nothing save the cry of the night-owls.

'O Tarvin Sahib,' she said. 'You know! After the first time I was sorry.'

'Which time was that?' inquired Tarvin vaguely.

'Of course it was when the saddle turned. And then when the timber fell from the archway I thought at least that I had maimed your horse. Was he hurt?'

'No,' said Tarvin, stupefied by her engaging frankness.

'Surely you knew,' she said almost reproachfully.

He shook his head. 'No, Sitabhai, my dear,' he said slowly and impressively. 'I wasn't on to you, and it's my eternal shame. But I'm beginning to sabe. You worked the little business at the dam, too, I suppose, and the bridge and the bullock-carts. And I thought it was their infernal clumsiness? Well, I'll be——' He whistled melodiously, and the sound was answered by the hoarse croak of a crane across the reeds.

The Queen leaped to her feet, thrusting her hand into her bosom. 'A signal!' Then sinking back upon the slab of the tomb, 'But you

have brought no one with you. I know you are not afraid to go alone.'

'Oh, I'm not trying to do *you* up, young lady,' he answered. 'I'm too busy admiring your picturesque and systematic deviltry. So you're at the bottom of all my troubles? That quicksand trick was a pretty one. Do you often work it?'

'Oh, on the dam!' exclaimed the Queen, waving her hands lightly. 'I only gave them orders to do what they could. But they are very clumsy people—only coolie people. They told me what they had done, and I was angry.'

'Kill any one?'

'No; why should I?'

'Well, if it comes to that, why should you be so hot on killing me?' inquired Tarvin dryly.

'I do not like any white men to stay here, and I knew that you had come to stay.' Tarvin smiled at the unconscious Americanism. 'Besides,' she went on, 'the Maharajah was fond of you, and I had never killed a white man. Then, too, I like you.'

'Oh!' responded Tarvin expressively.

'By Malang Shah, and you never knew!' She was swearing by the god of her own clan—the god of the gipsies.

'Well, don't rub it in,' said Tarvin.

'And you killed my big pet ape,' she went on. 'He used to salaam to me in the mornings like Luchman Rao, the prime minister. Tarvin Sahib, I have known many Englishmen. I have danced on the slack-rope before the mess-tents of the officers on the line of march, and taken my little begging gourd up to the big bearded colonel when I was no higher than his knee.' She lowered her hand to within a foot of the ground. 'And when I grew older,' she continued, 'I thought that I knew the hearts of all men. But, by Malang Shah, Tarvin Sahib, I never saw a man like unto you! Nay,' she went on almost beseechingly, 'do not say that you did not know. There is a love song in my tongue, "I have not slept between moon and moon because of you"; and indeed for me that song is quite true. Sometimes I think that I did not quite wish to see you die. But it would be better that you were dead. I, and I alone, command this State. And now, after that which you have told the King——'

'Yes? You heard, then?'

She nodded. 'After that I cannot see that there is any other way—unless you go away.'

'I'm not going,' said Tarvin.

'That is good,' said the Queen, with a little laugh. 'And so I shall not miss seeing you in the courtyard day by day. I thought the sun

would have killed you when you waited for the Maharajah. Be grateful to me, Tarvin Sahib, for I made the Maharajah come out. And you did me an ill turn.'

'My dear young lady,' said Tarvin earnestly, 'if you'd pull in your wicked little fangs, no one wants to hurt you. But I can't let you beat me about the Maharaj Kunwar. I'm here to see that the young man stays with us. Keep off the grass, and I'll drop it.'

'Again I do not understand,' said the Queen, bewildered. 'But what is the life of a little child to you who are a stranger here?'

'What is it to me? Why, it's fair-play; it's the life of a little child. What more do you want? Is nothing sacred to you?'

'I also have a son,' returned the Queen, 'and he is not weak. Nay, Tarvin Sahib, the child always was sickly from his birth. How can he govern men? *My* son will be a Rajput; and in the time to come—— But that is no concern of the white men. Let this little one go back to the gods!'

'Not if I know it,' responded Tarvin decisively.

'Otherwise,' swept on the Queen, 'he will live infirm and miserable for ninety years. I know the bastard Kulu stock that he comes from. Yes; I have sung at the gate of his mother's palace

when she and I were children—I in the dust, and she in her marriage-litter. To-day she is in the dust. Tarvin Sahib'—her voice melted appealingly—'I shall never bear another son; but I may at least mould the State from behind the curtain, as many queens have done. I am not a palace-bred woman. Those'—she pointed scornfully toward the lights of Rhatore—'have never seen the wheat wave, or heard the wind blow, or sat in a saddle, or talked face to face with men in the streets. They call me the gipsy, and they cower under their robes like fat slugs when I choose to lift my hand to the Maharajah's beard. Their bards sing of their ancestry for twelve hundred years. They are noble, forsooth! By Indur and Allah—yea, and the God of your missionaries too—their children and the British Government shall remember me for twice twelve hundred years. *Ahi*, Tarvin Sahib, you do not know how wise my little son is. I do not let him go to the missionary's. All that he shall need afterward—and indeed it is no little thing to govern this State—he shall learn from me; for I have seen the world, and I know. And until you came all was going so softly, so softly, to its end! The little one would have died—yes; and there would have been no more trouble. And never man nor woman in the palace would have breathed to the King one

word of what you cried aloud before the sun in the courtyard. Now, suspicion will never cease in the King's mind, and I do not know—I do not know——' She bent forward earnestly. 'Tarvin Sahib, if I have spoken one word of truth this night, tell me how much is known to you.'

Tarvin preserved absolute silence. She stole one hand pleadingly on his knee. 'And none would have suspected. When the ladies of the Viceroy came last year, I gave out of my own treasures twenty-five thousand rupees to the nursing hospital, and the lady sahib kissed me on both cheeks, and I talked English, and showed them how I spent my time knitting—I who knit and unknit the hearts of men.'

This time Tarvin did not whistle; he merely smiled and murmured sympathetically. The large and masterly range of her wickedness, and the coolness with which she addressed herself to it, gave her a sort of distinction. More than this, he respected her for the personal achievement which of all feats most nearly appeals to the breast of the men of the West—she had done him up. It was true her plans had failed; but she had played them all on him without his knowledge. He almost revered her for it.

'Now you begin to understand,' said Sitabhai; 'there is something more to think of. Do you

mean to go to Colonel Nolan, Sahib, with all your story about me?'

'Unless you keep your hands off the Maharaj Kunwar—yes,' said Tarvin, not allowing his feelings to interfere with business.

'That is very foolish,' said the Queen; 'because Colonel Nolan will give much trouble to the King, and the King will turn the palace into confusion, and every one of my handmaids, except a few, will give witness against me; and I perhaps shall come to be much suspected. Then you would think, Tarvin Sahib, that you had prevented me. But you cannot stay here for ever. You cannot stay here until I die. And so soon as you are gone——' She snapped her fingers.

'You won't get the chance,' said Tarvin unshakenly. 'I'll fix that. What do you take me for?'

The Queen bit the back of her forefinger irresolutely. There was no saying what this man, who strode unharmed through her machinations, might or might not be able to do. Had she been dealing with one of her own race she would have played threat against threat. But the perfectly composed and loose-knit figure by her side, watching every movement, chin in hand, ready, alert, confident, was an unknown quantity that baffled and distressed her.

There was a sound of a discreet cough, and Juggut Singh waddled toward them, bowing abjectly, to whisper something to the Queen. She laughed scornfully, and motioned him back to his post.

'He says the night is passing,' she explained, 'and it is death for him and for me to be without the palace.'

'Don't let me keep you,' said Tarvin, rising. 'I think we understand each other.' He looked into her eyes. 'Hands off!'

'Then I may not do what I please?' she said, 'and you will go to Colonel Nolan to-morrow?'

'That depends,' said Tarvin, shutting his lips. He thrust his hands into his pockets as he stood looking down at her.

'Seat yourself again a moment, Tarvin Sahib,' said Sitabhai, patting the slab of the tomb invitingly with her little palm. Tarvin obeyed. 'Now, if I let no more timber fall, and keep the grey apes tied fast——'

'And dry up the quicksands in the Amet River,' pursued Tarvin grimly. 'I see. My dear little spitfire, you are at liberty to do what you like. Don't let me interfere with your amusements.'

'I was wrong. I should have known that nothing would make you afraid,' said she, eyeing

him thoughtfully out of the corner of her eye; 'and, excepting you, Tarvin Sahib, there is no man that I fear. If you were a king as I a queen, we would hold Hindustan between our two hands.'

She clasped his locked fist as she spoke, and Tarvin, remembering that sudden motion to her bosom when he had whistled, laid his own hand quickly above hers, and held them fast.

'Is there nothing, Tarvin Sahib, that would make you leave me in peace? What is it you care for? You did not come here to keep the Maharaj Kunwar alive.'

'How do you know I didn't?'

'You are very wise,' she said, with a little laugh, 'but it is not good to pretend to be too wise. Shall I tell you why you came?'

'Well, why did I? Speak up.'

'You came here, as you came to the temple of Iswara, to find that which you will never find, unless'—she leaned toward him—'I help you. Was it very cold in the Cow's Mouth, Tarvin Sahib?'

Tarvin drew back, frowning, but not betraying himself further.

'I was afraid that the snakes would have killed you there?'

'*Were* you?'

'Yes,' she said softly. 'And I was afraid,

too, that you might not have stepped swiftly enough for the turning stone in the temple.'

Tarvin glanced at her. 'No?'

'Yes. Ah! I knew what was in your mind, even before you spoke to the King—when the bodyguard charged.'

'See here, young woman, do you run a private inquiry agency?'

She laughed. 'There is a song in the palace now about your bravery. But the boldest thing was to speak to the King about the Naulahka. He told me all you said. But he—even he did not dream that any *feringhi* could dare to covet it. And I was so good—I did not tell him. But I knew men like you are not made for little things. Tarvin Sahib,' she said, leaning close, releasing her hand and laying it softly on his shoulder, 'you and I are kin indeed! For it is more easy to govern this State—ay, and from this State to recapture all Hindustan from these white dogs, the English—than to do what you have dreamed of. And yet a stout heart makes all things easy. Was it for yourself, Tarvin Sahib, that you wanted the Naulahka, or for another—even as I desire Gokral Seetarun for my son? We are not little people. It is for another, is it not?'

'Look here,' said Tarvin reverently, as he took her hand from his shoulder and held it firmly

in his clutch again, 'are there many of you in India?'

'But one. I am like yourself—alone.' Her chin drooped against his shoulder, and she looked up at him out of her eyes as dark as the lake. The scarlet mouth and the quivering nostrils were so close to his own that the fragrant breath swept his cheek.

'Are you making states, Tarvin Sahib, like me? No; surely it is a woman. Your government is decreed for you, and you do what it orders. I turned the canal which the Government said should run through my orange-garden, even as I will bend the King to my will, even as I will kill the boy, even as I will myself rule in Gokral Seetarun through my child. But you, Tarvin Sahib—you wish only a woman! Is it not so? And she is too little to bear the weight of the Luck of the State. She grows paler day by day.' She felt the man quiver, but he said nothing.

From the tangle of scrub and brushwood at the far end of the lake broke forth a hoarse barking cough that filled the hills with desolation as water brims a cup. Tarvin leaped to his feet. For the first time he heard the angry complaint of the tiger going home to his lair after a fruitless night of ranging.

'It is nothing,' said the Queen, without stirring. 'It is only the tiger of the Dungar Talao. I have

heard them howling many times when I was a gipsy, and even if he came you would shoot him, would you not, as you shot the ape?'

She nestled close to him, and, as he sank beside her on the stone again, his arm slipped unconsciously about her waist.

The shadow of the beast drifted across an open space by the lake-shore as noiselessly as thistle-down draws through the air of summer, and Tarvin's arm tightened in its resting-place—tightened on a bossed girdle that struck cold on his palm through many folds of muslin.

'So little and so frail—how could she wear it?' resumed the Queen.

She turned a little in his embrace, and Tarvin's arm brushed against one, and another, and then another, strand of the girdle, studded like the first with irregular bosses, till under his elbow he felt a great square stone.

He started, and tightened his hold about her waist, with paling lips.

'But we two,' the Queen went on, in a low voice, regarding him dreamily, 'could make the kingdom fight like the water-buffaloes in spring. Would you be my prime minister, Tarvin Sahib, and advise me through the curtain?'

'I don't know whether I could trust you,' said Tarvin briefly.

'I do not know whether I could trust myself,' responded the Queen; 'for after a time it might be that I should be servant who have always been queen. I have come near to casting my heart under the hoofs of your horse—not once, but many times.' She put her arms around his neck and joined them there, gazing into his eyes, and drawing his head down to hers. 'Is it a little thing,' she cooed, 'if I ask you to be my king? In the old days, before the English came, Englishmen of no birth stole the hearts of begums, and led their armies. They were kings in all but the name. We do not know when the old days may return, and we might lead our armies together.'

'All right. Keep the place open for me. I might come back and apply for it one of these days when I've worked a scheme or two at home.'

'Then you are going away—you will leave us soon?'

'I'll leave you when I've got what I want, my dear,' he answered, pressing her closer.

She bit her lip. 'I might have known,' she said softly. 'I, too, have never turned aside from anything I desired. Well, and what is it?'

The mouth drooped a little at the corners, as the head fell on his shoulder. Glancing down, he saw the ruby-jewelled jade handle of a little knife at her breast.

He disengaged himself from her arms with a quick movement, and rose to his feet. She was very lovely as she stretched her arms appealingly out to him in the half light; but he was there for other things.

Tarvin looked at her between the eyes, and her glance fell.

'I'll take what you have around your waist, please.'

'I might have known that the white man thinks only of money!' she cried scornfully.

She unclasped a silver belt from her waist and threw it from her, clinking, upon the marble.

Tarvin did not give it a glance.

'You know me better than that,' he said quietly. 'Come, hold up your hands. Your game is played.'

'I do not understand,' she said. 'Shall I give you some rupees?' she asked scornfully. 'Be quick, Juggut Singh is bringing the horses.'

'Oh, I'll be quick enough. Give me the Naulahka.'

'The Naulahka?'

'The same. I'm tired of tipsy bridges and ungirt horses and uneasy arches and dizzy quicksands. I want the necklace.'

'And I may have the boy?'

'No; neither boy nor necklace.'

'And will you go to Colonel Nolan in the morning?'

'The morning is here now. You'd better be quick.'

'Will you go to Colonel Nolan,' she repeated, rising and facing him.

'Yes; if you don't give me the necklace.'

'And if I do?'

'No. Is it a trade?' It was his question to Mrs. Mutrie.

The Queen looked desperately at the day-star that was beginning to pale in the East. Even her power over the King could not save her from death if the day discovered her beyond the palace walls.

The man spoke as one who held her life in the hollow of his hand; and she knew he was right. If he had proof he would not scruple to bring it before the Maharajah; and if the Maharajah believed—— Sitabhai could feel the sword at her throat. She would be no founder of a dynasty, but a nameless disappearance in the palace. Mercifully, the King had not been in a state to understand the charges Tarvin had brought against her in the courtyard. But she lay open now to anything this reckless and determined stranger might choose to do against her. At the least he could bring upon her the formless suspicion of an Indian

court, worse than death to her plans, and the removal of Maharaj Kunwar beyond her power, through the interposition of Colonel Nolan; and at the worst—— But she did not pursue this train of thought.

She cursed the miserable weakness of liking for him which had prevented her from killing him just now as he lay in her arms. She had meant to kill him from the first moment of their interview; she had let herself toy too long with the fascination of being dominated by a will stronger than her own, but there was still time.

'And if I do not give you the Naulahka?' she asked.

'I guess you know best about that.'

As her eye wandered out on the plain she saw that the stars no longer had fire in them; the black water of the reservoir paled and grew grey, and the wild-fowl were waking in the reeds. The dawn was upon her, as merciless as the man. Juggut Singh was leading up the horses, motioning to her in an agony of impatience and terror. The sky was against her; and there was no help on earth.

She put her hands behind her. Tarvin heard the snap of a clasp, and the Naulahka lay about her feet in ripples of flame.

Without looking at him or the necklace, she

moved toward the horses. Tarvin stooped swiftly and possessed himself of the treasure. Juggut Singh had released his horse. Tarvin strode forward and caught at the bridle, cramming the necklace into his breast-pocket.

He bent to make sure of his girth. The Queen, standing behind her horse, waited an instant to mount.

'Good-bye, Tarvin Sahib; and remember the gipsy,' she said, flinging her arm out over the horse's withers. '*Heh!*'

A flicker of light passed his eye. The jade handle of the Queen's knife quivered in the saddle-flap, half an inch above his right shoulder. His horse plunged forward at the Queen's stallion, with a snort of pain.

'Kill him, Juggut Singh!' gasped the Queen, pointing to Tarvin, as the eunuch scrambled into his saddle. 'Kill him!'

Tarvin caught her tender wrist in his fast grip. 'Easy there, girl! Easy!' She returned his gaze, baffled. 'Let me put you up,' he said.

He put his arms about her and swung her into the saddle.

'Now give us a kiss,' he said, as she looked down at him.

She stooped. 'No, you don't! Give me your hands.' He prisoned both wrists, and kissed her

full upon the mouth. Then he smote the horse resoundingly upon the flank, and the animal blundered down the path and leaped out into the plain.

He watched the Queen and Juggut Singh disappear in a cloud of dust and flying stones, and turned with a deep sigh of relief to the lake. Drawing the Naulahka from its resting-place, and laying it fondly out upon his hands, he fed his eyes upon it.

The stones kindled with the glow of the dawn, and mocked the shifting colours of the hill. The shining ropes of gems put to shame the red glare that shot up from behind the reeds, as they had dulled the glare of the torches on the night of the little Prince's wedding. The tender green of the reeds themselves, the intense blue of the lake, the beryl of the flashing kingfishers, and the blinding ripples spreading under the first rays of the sun, as a bevy of coots flapped the water from their wings—the necklace abashed them all. Only the black diamond took no joy from the joy of the morning, but lay among its glorious fellows as sombre and red-hearted as the troublous night out of which Tarvin had snatched it.

Tarvin ran the stones through his hands one by one, and there were forty-five of them—each stone perfect and flawless of its kind; nipped, lest

any of its beauty should be hidden, by a tiny gold clasp, each stone swinging all but free from the strand of soft gold on which it was strung, and each stone worth a king's ransom or a queen's good name.

It was a good moment for Tarvin. His life gathered into it. Topaz was safe!

The wild duck were stringing to and fro across the lake, and the cranes called to one another, stalking through reeds almost as tall as their scarlet heads. From some temple hidden among the hills a lone priest chanted sonorously as he made the morning sacrifice to his god, and from the city in the plain came the boom of the first ward-drums, telling that the gates were open and the day was born.

Tarvin lifted his head from the necklace. The jade-handled knife was lying at his feet. He picked up the delicate weapon and threw it into the lake.

'And now for Kate,' he said.

XVIII

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
And the State is thus and thus:
Our legions wait at the palace gate—
Little it profits us,
Now we are come to our Kingdom.

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
The crown is ours to take—
With a naked sword at the council board,
And under the throne of the snake,
Now we are come to our Kingdom.

Now we are come to our Kingdom,
But my love's eyelids fall,
All that I wrought for, all that I fought for,
Delight her nothing at all.
My crown is withered leaves,
For she sits in the dust and grieves,
Now we are come to our Kingdom.
King Anthony.

THE palace on its red rock seemed to be still asleep as he cantered across the empty plain. A man on a camel rode out of one of the city gates at right angles to his course, and Tarvin

noted with interest how swiftly a long-legged camel of the desert can move. Familiar as he had now become with the ostrich-necked beasts, he could not help associating them with Barnum's Circus and boyhood memories. The man drew near and crossed in front of him. Then, in the stillness of the morning, Tarvin heard the dry click of a voice he understood. It was the sound made by bringing up the cartridge of a repeating rifle. Mechanically he slipped from the saddle, and was on the other side of the horse as the rifle spoke, and a puff of blue smoke drifted up and hung motionless above the camel.

'I might have known she'd get in her work early,' he muttered, peering over his horse's withers. 'I can't drop him at this distance with a revolver. What's the fool waiting for?'

Then he perceived that, with characteristic native inaptitude, the man had contrived to jam his lever, and was beating it furiously on the fore-part of the saddle. He remounted hastily, and galloped up, revolver in hand, to cover the blanched visage of Juggut Singh.

'*You!* Why, Juggut, old man, this isn't kind of you.'

'It was an order,' said Juggut, quivering with apprehension. 'It was no fault of mine. I—I do not understand these things.'

'I should smile. Let me show you.' He took the rifle from the trembling hand. 'The cartridge is jammed, my friend; it don't shoot as well that way. It only needs a little knack—so! You ought to learn it, Juggut.' He jerked the empty shell over his shoulder.

'What will you do to me?' cried the eunuch. 'She would have killed me if I had not come.'

'Don't you believe it, Juggut. She's a Jumbo at theory, but weak in practice. Go on ahead, please.'

They started back toward the city, Juggut leading the way on his camel, looking back apprehensively every minute. Tarvin smiled at him dryly but reassuringly, balancing on his hip the captured rifle. He observed that it was a very good rifle if properly used.

At the entrance to Sitabhai's wing of the palace, Juggut Singh dismounted and slunk into the courtyard, the livid image of fear and shame. Tarvin clattered after him, and as the eunuch was about to disappear through a door, called him back.

'You have forgotten your gun, Juggut,' he said. 'Don't be afraid of it.' Juggut was putting up a doubtful hand to take it from him. 'It won't hurt anybody this trip. Take yourself back to the lady, and tell her you are returned, with thanks.'

No sound came to his ear from behind the

green shutters as he rode away, leaving Juggut staring after him. Nothing fell upon him from out of the arch, and the apes were tied securely. Sitabhai's next move was evidently yet to be played.

His own next move he had already reckoned with. It was a case for bolting.

He rode to the mosque outside the city, routed out his old friend in dove-coloured satin, and made him send this message:—

'Mrs. Mutrie, Denver.—*Necklace is yours. Get throat ready and lay that track into Topaz.* —Tarvin.'

Then he turned his horse's head toward Kate. He buttoned his coat tightly across his chest, and patted the resting-place of the Naulahka fondly, as he strode up the path to the missionary's veranda, when he had tethered Fibby outside. His high good humour with himself and the world spoke through his eyes as he greeted Mrs. Estes at the door.

'You have been hearing something pleasant,' she said. 'Won't you come in?'

'Well, either the pleasantest, or next to the pleasantest; I'm not sure which,' he answered with a smile, as he followed her into the familiar sitting-room. 'I'd like to tell you all about it, Mrs. Estes. I feel almightily like telling somebody. But it isn't a healthy story for this neigh-

bourhood.' He glanced about him. 'I'd hire the town crier and a few musical instruments and advertise it, if I had my way; and we'd all have a little Fourth of July celebration and a bonfire, and I'd read the Declaration of Independence over the natives with a relish. But it won't do. There *is* a story I'd like to tell you, though,' he added, with a sudden thought. 'You know why I come here so much, don't you, Mrs. Estes—I mean outside of your kindness to me, and my liking you all so much, and our always having such good times together? You know, don't you?'

Mrs. Estes smiled. 'I suppose I do,' she said.

'Well; that's right! That's right. I thought you did. Then I hope you're my friend!'

'If you mean that I wish you well, I do. But you can understand that I feel responsible for Miss Sheriff. I have sometimes thought I ought to let her mother know.'

'Oh, her mother knows! She's full of it. You might say she liked it. The trouble isn't there, you know, Mrs. Estes.'

'No. She's a singular girl; very strong, very sweet. I've grown to love her dearly. She has wonderful courage. But I should like it better for her if she would give it up, and all that goes with it. She would be better married,' she said meditatively.

Tarvin gazed at her admiringly. 'How wise you are, Mrs. Estes! How wise you are!' he murmured. 'If I've told her that once I've told her a dozen times. Don't you think, also, that it would be better if she were married at once—right away, without too much loss of time?'

His companion looked at him to see if he was in earnest. Tarvin was sometimes a little perplexing to her. 'I think if you are clever you will leave it to the course of events,' she replied, after a moment. 'I have watched her work here, hoping that she might succeed where every one else has failed. But I know in my heart that she won't. There's too much against her. She's working against thousands of years of traditions, and training, and habits of life. Sooner or later they are certain to defeat her; and then, whatever her courage, she must give in. I've thought sometimes lately that she might have trouble very soon. There's a good deal of dissatisfaction at the hospital. Lucien hears some stories that make me anxious.'

'Anxious! I should say so. That's the worst of it. It isn't only that she won't come to me, Mrs. Estes—that you can understand—but she is running her head meanwhile into all sorts of impossible dangers. I haven't time to wait until she sees that point. I haven't time to wait until she

sees any point at all but that this present moment, now and here, would be a good moment in which to marry Nicholas Tarvin. I've got to get out of Rhatore. That's the long and the short of it, Mrs. Estes. Don't ask me why. It's necessary. And I must take Kate with me. Help me if you love her.'

To this appeal Mrs. Estes made the handsomest response in her power, by saying that she would go up and tell her that he wished to see her. This seemed to take some time; and Tarvin waited patiently, with a smile on his lips. He did not doubt that Kate would yield. In the glow of another success it was not possible to him to suppose that she would not come around now. Had he not the Naulahka? She went with it; she was indissolubly connected with it. Yet he was willing to impress into his service all the help he could get, and he was glad to believe that Mrs. Estes was talking to her.

It was an added prophecy of success when he found from a copy of a recent issue of the *Topaz Telegram*, which he picked up while he waited, that the 'Lingering Lode' had justified his expectations. The people he had left in charge had struck a true fissure vein, and were taking out $500 a week. He crushed the paper into his pocket, restraining an inclination to dance; it was

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perhaps safest, on reflection, to postpone that exercise until he had seen Kate. The little congratulatory whistle that he struck up instead, he had to sober a moment later into a smile as Kate opened the door and came in to him. There could be no two ways about it with her now. His smile, do what he would, almost said as much.

A single glance at her face showed him, however, that the affair struck her less simply. He forgave her; she could not know the source of his inner certitude. He even took time to like the grey house-dress, trimmed with black velvet, that she was wearing in place of the white which had become habitual to her.

'I'm glad you've dropped white for a moment,' he said, as he rose to shake hands with her. 'It's a sign. It represents a general abandonment and desertion of this blessed country; and that's just the mood I want to find you in. I want you to drop it, chuck it, throw it up.' He held her brown little hand in the swarthy fist he pushed out from his own white sleeve, and looked down into her eyes attentively.

'What?'

'India—the whole business. I want you to come with me?' He spoke gently.

She looked up, and he saw in the quivering lines

about her mouth signs of the contest on this theme she had passed through before coming down to him.

'You are going? I'm so glad.' She hesitated a moment. 'You know why?' she added, with what he saw was an intention of kindness.

Tarvin laughed as he seated himself. 'I like that. Yes; I'm going,' he said. 'But I'm not going alone. You're in the plan,' he assured her, with a nod.

She shook her head.

'No; don't say that, Kate. You mustn't. It's serious this time.'

'Hasn't it always been?' she sank into a chair. 'It's always been serious enough for me—that I couldn't do what you wish, I mean. Not doing it—that is doing something else; the one thing I want to do—is the most serious thing in the world to me. Nothing has happened to change me, Nick. I would tell you in a moment if it had. How is it different for either of us?'

'Lots of ways. But that I've got to leave Rhatore for a sample. You don't think I'd leave you behind, I hope.'

She studied the hands she had folded in her lap for a moment. Then she looked up and faced him with her open gaze.

'Nick,' she said, 'let me try to explain as

clearly as I can how all this seems to me. You can correct me if I'm wrong.'

'Oh, you're sure to be wrong!' he cried; but he leaned forward.

'Well, let me try. You ask me to marry you!'

'I do,' answered Tarvin solemnly. 'Give me a chance of saying that before a clergyman, and you'll see.'

'I am grateful, Nick. It's a gift—the highest, the best, and I'm grateful. But what is it you really want? Shall you mind my asking that, Nick? You want me to round out your life; you want me to complete your other ambitions. Isn't that so? Tell me honestly, Nick; isn't that so?'

'No!' roared Tarvin.

'Ah, but it is! Marriage is that way. It is right. Marriage means that—to be absorbed into another's life: to live your own, not as your own but another's. It is a good life. It's a woman's life. I can like it; I can believe in it. But I can't see myself in it. A woman gives the whole of herself in marriage—in all happy marriages. I haven't the whole of myself to give. It belongs to something else. And I couldn't offer you a part; it is all the best men give to women, but from a woman it would do no man any good.'

'You mean that you have the choice between giving up your work and giving up me, and that the last is easiest.'

'I don't say that; but suppose I did, would it be so strange? Be honest, Nick. Suppose I asked you to give up the centre and meaning of *your* life? Suppose I asked you to give up *your* work? And suppose I offered in exchange—marriage! No, no!' She shook her head. 'Marriage is good; but what man would pay that price for it?'

'My dearest girl, isn't that just the opportunity of women?'

'The opportunity of the happy women—yes; but it isn't given to every one to see marriage like that. Even for women there is more than one kind of devotion.'

'Oh, look here, Kate! A man isn't an Orphan Asylum or a Home for the Friendless. You take him too seriously. You talk as if you had to make him your leading charity, and give up everything to the business. Of course you have to pretend something of the kind at the start, but in practice you only have to eat a few dinners, attend a semi-annual board meeting, and a strawberry festival or two to keep the thing going. It's just a general agreement to drink your coffee with a man in the morning, and be somewhere around,

not too far from the fire, in not too ugly a dress, when he comes home in the evening. Come! It's an easy contract. Try me, Kate, and you'll see how simple I'll make it for you. I know about the other things. I understand well enough that you would never care for a life which didn't allow you to make a lot of people happy besides your husband. I recognise that. I begin with it. And I say that's just what I want. You have a talent for making folks happy. Well, I secure you on a special agreement to make me happy, and after you've attended to that, I want you to sail in and make the whole world bloom with your kindness. And you'll do it, too. Confound it, Kate, *we'll* do it! No one knows how good *two* people could be if they formed a syndicate and made a business of it. It hasn't been tried. Try it with me! O Kate, I love you, I need you, and if you'll let me, I'll make a life for you!'

'I know, Nick, you would be kind. You would do all that a man can do. But it isn't the man who makes marriages happy or possible; it's the woman, and it must be. I should either do my part and shirk the other, and then I should be miserable; or I should shirk *you* and be more miserable. Either way such happiness is not for me.'

Tarvin's hand found the Naulahka within his

breast, and clutched it tight. Strength seemed to go out of it into him—strength to restrain himself from losing all by a dozen savage words.

'Kate, my girl,' he said quietly, 'we haven't time to conjure dangers. We have to face a real one. You are not safe here. I can't leave you in this place, and I've got to go. That is why I ask you to marry me at once?'

'But I fear nothing. Who would harm me?'

'Sitabhai,' he answered grimly. 'But what difference does it make? I tell you, you are not safe. Be sure that I know.'

'And you?'

'Oh, I don't count.'

'The truth, Nick!' she demanded.

'Well, I always said that there was nothing like the climate of Topaz.'

'You mean you are in danger—great danger, perhaps.'

'Sitabhai isn't going round hunting for ways to save my precious life, that's a fact.' He smiled at her.

'Then you must go away at once; you mustn't lose an hour. O Nick, you won't wait!'

'That's what I say. I can do without Rhatore; but I can't do without you. You must come.'

'Do you mean that if I don't you will stay?' she asked desperately.

'No; that would be a threat. I mean I'll wait for you.' His eyes laughed at her.

'Nick, is this because of what I asked you to do?' she demanded suddenly.

'You didn't ask me,' he defended.

'Then it is, and I am much to blame.'

'What, because I spoke to the King? My dear girl, that isn't more than the introductory walk-around of this circus. Don't run away with any question of responsibility. The only thing you are responsible for at this moment is to run with me—flee, vamoose, get out! Your life isn't worth an hour's purchase here. I'm convinced of that. And mine isn't worth a minute's.'

'You see what a situation you put me in,' she said accusingly.

'I don't put you in it; but I offer you a simple solution.'

'Yourself!'

'Well, yes; I said it was simple. I don't claim it's brilliant. Almost any one could do more for you; and there are millions of better men, but there isn't one who could love you better. O Kate, Kate,' he cried, rising, 'trust yourself to my love, and I'll back myself against the world to make you happy.'

'No, no,' she exclaimed eagerly; 'you must go away.'

He shook his head. 'I can't leave you. Ask that of some one else. Do you suppose a man who loves you can abandon you in this desert wilderness to take your chances? Do you suppose any man could do that? Kate, my darling, come with me. You torment me, you kill me, by forcing me to allow you a single moment out of my sight. I tell you, you are in imminent, deadly peril. You won't stay, knowing that. Surely you won't sacrifice your life for these creatures.'

'Yes,' she cried, rising, with the uplifted look on her face. 'Yes! If it is good to live for them, it is good to die for them. I do not believe my life is necessary; but if it is necessary, that too!'

Tarvin gazed at her, baffled, disheartened, at a loss. 'And you won't come?'

'I can't. Good-bye, Nick. It's the end.'

He took her hand. 'Good afternoon,' he responded. 'It's end enough for to-day.'

She pursued him anxiously with her eye as he turned away; suddenly she started after him, 'But you will go?'

'Go! No! No!' he shouted. 'I'll stay now if I have to organise a standing army, declare myself king, and hold the rest-house as the seat of government. *Go!*'

She put forth a detaining, despairing hand, but he was gone.

Kate returned to the little Maharaj Kunwar, who had been allowed to lighten his convalescence by bringing down from the palace a number of his toys and pets. She sat down by the side of the bed, and cried for a long time silently.

'What is it, Miss Kate?' asked the Prince, after he had watched her for some minutes, wondering. 'Indeed, I am quite well now, so there is nothing to cry for. When I go back to the palace I will tell my father all that you have done for me, and he will give you a village. We Rajputs do not forget.'

'It's not that, Lalji,' she said, stooping over him, drying her tear-stained eyes.

'Then my father will give you *two* villages. No one must cry when I am getting well, for I am a king's son. Where is Moti? I want him to sit upon a chair.'

Kate rose obediently, and began to call for the Maharaj Kunwar's latest pet—a little grey monkey, with a gold collar, who wandered at liberty through the house and garden, and at night did his best to win a place for himself by the young Prince's side. He answered the call from the boughs of a tree in the garden, where he was arguing with the wild parrots, and entered the room, crooning softly in the monkey tongue.

'Come here, little Hanuman,' said the Prince,

raising one hand. The monkey bounded to his side. 'I have heard of a king,' said the Prince, playing with his golden collar, 'who spent three lakhs in marrying two monkeys. Moti, wouldst thou like a wife? No, no—a gold collar is enough for thee. We will spend our three lakhs in marrying Miss Kate to Tarvin Sahib, when we get well, and thou shalt dance at the wedding.' He was speaking in the vernacular, but Kate understood too well the coupling of her name with Tarvin's.

'Don't, Lalji, don't!'

'Why not, Kate? Why, even I am married.'

'Yes, yes. But it is different. Kate would rather you didn't, Lalji.'

'Very well,' answered the Maharaj, with a pout. 'Now I am only a little child. When I am well I will be a king again, and no one can refuse my gifts. Listen. Those are my father's trumpets. He is coming to see me.'

A bugle call sounded in the distance. There was a clattering of horses' feet, and a little later the Maharajah's carriage and escort thundered up to the door of the missionary's house. Kate looked anxiously to see if the noise irritated her young charge; but his eyes brightened, his nostrils quivered, and he whispered, as his hand tightened on the hilt of the sword always by his side—

'That is very good! My father has brought *all* his sowars.'

Before Kate could rise, Mr. Estes had ushered the Maharajah into the room, which was dwarfed by his bulk and by the bravery of his presence. He had been assisting at a review of his body-guard, and came therefore in his full uniform as commander-in-chief of the army of the State, which was no mean affair. The Maharaj Kunwar ran his eyes delightedly up and down the august figure of his father, beginning with the polished gold-spurred jack-boots, and ascending to the snowy-white doeskin breeches, the tunic blazing with gold, and the diamonds of the Order of the Star of India, ending with the saffron turban and its nodding emerald aigrette. The King drew off his gauntlets and shook hands cordially with Kate. After an orgy it was noticeable that his Highness became more civilised.

'And is the child well?' he asked. 'They told me that it was a little fever, and I, too, have had some fever.'

'The Prince's trouble was much worse than that, I am afraid, Maharajah Sahib,' said Kate.

'Ah, little one,' said the King, bending over his son very tenderly, and speaking in the vernacular, 'this is the fault of eating too much.'

'Nay, father, I did not eat, and I am quite well.'

Kate stood at the head of the bed stroking the boy's hair.

'How many troops paraded this morning?'

'Both squadrons, my General,' answered the father, his eye lighting with pride. 'Thou art all a Rajput, my son.'

'And my escort—where were they?'

'With Pertab Singh's troop. They led the charge at the end of the fight.'

'By the Sacred Horse,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, 'they shall lead in true fight one day. Shall they not, my father? Thou on the right flank, and I on the left.'

'Even so. But to do these things, a prince must not be ill, and he must learn many things.'

'I know,' returned the Prince reflectively. 'My father, I have lain here some nights, thinking. Am I a little child?' He looked at Kate a minute, and whispered, 'I would speak to my father. Let no one come in.'

Kate left the room quickly, with a backward smile at the boy, and the King seated himself by the bed.

'No, I am not a little child,' said the Prince. 'In five years I shall be a man, and many men will obey me. But how shall I know the right or the wrong in giving an order?'

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'It is necessary to learn many things,' repeated the Maharajah vaguely.

'Yes, I have thought of that lying here in the dark,' said the Prince. 'And it is in my mind that these things are not all learned within the walls of the palace, or from women. My father, let me go away to learn how to be a prince!'

'But whither wouldst thou go? Surely my kingdom is thy home, beloved.'

'I know, I know,' returned the boy. 'And I will come back again, but do not let me be a laughing-stock to the other princes. At the wedding the Rawut of Bunnaul mocked me because my school-books were not as many as his. And *he* is only the son of an ennobled lord. He is without ancestry. But he has been up and down Rajputana as far as Delhi and Agra, ay, and Abu; and he is in the upper class of the Princes' School at Ajmir. Father, all the sons of the kings go there. They do not play with the women; they ride with men. And the air and the water are good at Ajmir. And I should like to go!'

The face of the Maharajah grew troubled, for the boy was very dear to him.

'But an evil might befall thee, Lalji. Think again.'

'I *have* thought,' responded the Prince.

'What evil can come to me under the charge of the Englishman there? The Rawut of Bunnaul told me that I should have my own rooms, my own servants, and my own stables, like the other princes—and that I should be much considered there.'

'Yes,' said the King soothingly. 'We be children of the sun—thou and I, my Prince.'

'Then it concerns me to be as learned and as strong and as valiant as the best of my race. Father, I am sick of running about the rooms of the women, of listening to my mother, and to the singing of the dance girls; and they are always pressing their kisses on me. Let me go to Ajmir. Let me go to the Princes' School. And in a year, even in a year—so says the Rawut of Bunnaul—I shall be fit to lead my escort, as a King should lead them. Is it a promise, my father?'

'When thou art well,' answered the Maharajah, 'we will speak of it again—not as a father to a child, but as a man to a man.'

The Maharaj Kunwar's eyes grew bright with pleasure. 'That is good,' he said—'as a man to a man.'

The Maharajah fondled him in his arms for a few minutes, and told him the small news of the palace—such things as would interest a little boy. Then he said laughing, 'Have I your leave to go?'

'Oh! my father.' The Prince buried his head in his father's beard and threw his arms around him. The Maharajah disengaged himself gently, and as gently went out into the veranda. Before Kate returned he had disappeared in a cloud of dust and a flourish of trumpets. As he was going, a messenger came to the house bearing a grass-woven basket, piled high with shaddock, banana, and pomegranate — emerald, gold, and copper, which he laid at Kate's feet, saying, 'It is a present from the Queen.'

The little Prince within heard the voice, and cried joyfully, 'Kate, my mother has sent you those. Are they big fruits? Oh, give me a pomegranate,' he begged as she came back into his room. 'I have tasted none since last winter.'

Kate set the basket on the table, and the Prince's mood changed. He wanted pomegranate sherbet, and Kate must mix the sugar and the milk and the syrup and the plump red seeds. Kate left the room for an instant to get a glass, and it occurred to Moti, who had been foiled in an attempt to appropriate the Prince's emeralds, and had hidden under the bed, to steal forth and seize upon a ripe banana. Knowing well that the Maharaj Kunwar could not move, Moti paid no attention to his voice, but settled himself deliberately on his haunches, chose his banana, stripped off the skin

with his little black fingers, grinned at the Prince, and began to eat.

'Very well, Moti,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, in the vernacular; 'Kate says you are not a god, but only a little grey monkey, and I think so too. When she comes back you will be beaten, Hanuman.'

Moti had half eaten the banana when Kate returned, but he did not try to escape. She cuffed the marauder lightly, and he fell over on his side.

'Why, Lalji, what's the matter with Moti?' she asked, regarding the monkey curiously.

'He has been stealing, and now I suppose he is playing dead man. Hit him!'

Kate bent over the limp little body; but there was no need to chastise Moti. He was dead.

She turned pale, and, rising, took the basket of fruit quickly to her nostrils, and sniffed delicately at it. A faint, sweet, cloying odour rose from the brilliant pile. It was overpowering. She set the basket down, putting her hand to her head. The odour dizzied her.

'Well,' said the Prince, who could not see his dead pet, 'I want my sherbet.'

'The fruit is not quite good, I'm afraid, Lalji,' she said, with an effort. As she spoke she tossed into the garden, through the open window, the

uneaten fragment of the banana that Moti had clasped so closely to his wicked little breast.

A parrot swooped down on the morsel instantly from the trees, and took it back to his perch in the branches. It was done before Kate, still unsteadied, could make a motion to stop it, and a moment later a little ball of green feathers fell from the covert of leaves, and the parrot also lay dead on the ground.

'No, the fruit is not good,' she said mechanically, her eyes wide with terror, and her face blanched. Her thoughts leaped to Tarvin. Ah, the warnings and the entreaties that she had put from her! He had said she was not safe. Was he not right? The awful subtlety of the danger in which she stood was a thing to shake a stronger woman than she. From where would it come next? Out of what covert might it not leap? The very air might be poisoned. She scarcely dared to breathe.

The audacity of the attack daunted her as much as its design. If this might be done in open day, under cover of friendship, immediately after the visit of the King, what might not the gipsy in the palace dare next? She and the Maharaj Kunwar were under the same roof; if Tarvin was right in supposing that Sitabhai could wish her harm, the fruit was evidently intended for them both. She

shuddered to think how she herself might have given the fruit to the Maharaj innocently.

The Prince turned in his bed and regarded Kate. 'You are not well?' he asked, with grave politeness. 'Then do not trouble about the sherbet. Give me Moti to play with.'

'O Lalji! Lalji!' cried Kate, tottering to the bed. She dropped beside the boy, cast her arms defendingly about him, and burst into tears.

'You have cried twice,' said the Prince, watching her heaving shoulders curiously. 'I shall tell Tarvin Sahib.'

The word smote Kate's heart, and filled her with a bitter and fruitless longing. Oh, for a moment of the sure and saving strength she had just rejected! Where was he? she asked herself reproachfully. What had happened to the man she had sent from her to take the chances of life and death in this awful land?

At that hour Tarvin was sitting in his room at the rest-house, with both doors open to the stifling wind of the desert, that he might command all approaches clearly, his revolver on the table in front of him, and the Naulahka in his pocket, yearning to be gone, and loathing this conquest that did not include Kate.

XIX

We be the Gods of the East—
Older than all—
Masters of mourning and feast,
How shall we fall?

Will they gape to the husks that ye proffer,
Or yearn to your song?
And we, have we nothing to offer
Who ruled them so long
In the fume of the incense, the clash of the cymbal, the blare
of the conch and the gong?

Over the strife of the schools,
Low the day burns—
Back with the kine from the pools,
Each one returns,
To the life that he knows where the altar-flame glows
And the *tulsi* is trimmed in the urns.

In Seonee.

THE evening and the long night gave Kate ample time for self-examination after she had locked up the treacherous fruit, and consoled the Maharaj, through her tears, for the

mysterious death of Moti. One thing only seemed absolutely clear to her, when she rose red-eyed and unrefreshed the next morning: her work was with the women so long as life remained, and the sole refuge for her present trouble was in the portion of that work which lay nearest to her hand. Meanwhile the man who loved her remained in Gokral Seetarun, in deadly peril of his life, that he might be within call of her; and she could not call him, for to summon him was to yield, and she dared not.

She took her way to the hospital. The dread for him that had assailed her yesterday had become a horror that would not let her think.

The woman of the desert was waiting as usual at the foot of the steps, her hands clasped over her knee, and her face veiled. Behind her was Dhunpat Rai, who should have been among the wards; and she could see that the courtyard was filled with people—strangers and visitors, who, by her new regulations, were allowed to come only once a week. This was not their visiting day, and Kate, strained and worn by all that she had passed through since the day before, felt an angry impulse in her heart go out against them, and spoke wrathfully.

'What is the meaning of this, Dhunpat Rai?' she demanded, alighting.

'There is commotion of popular bigotry within,' said Dhunpat Rai. 'It is nothing. I have seen it before. Only do not go in.'

She put him aside without a word, and was about to enter when she met one of her patients, a man in the last stage of typhoid fever, being borne out by half a dozen clamouring friends, who shouted at her menacingly. The woman of the desert was at her side in an instant, raising her hand, in the brown hollow of which lay a long, broad-bladed knife.

'Be still, dogs!' she shouted, in their own tongue. 'Dare not to lay hands on this *peri*, who has done all for you!'

'She is killing our people,' shouted a villager.

'Maybe,' said the woman, with a flashing smile; 'but I know who will be lying here dead if you do not suffer her to pass. Are you Rajputs, or Bhils from the hills, hunters of fish, and diggers after grubs, that you run like cattle because a lying priest from nowhere troubles your heads of mud? Is she killing your people? How long can *you* keep that man alive with your charms and your *muntras*?' she demanded, pointing to the stricken form on the stretcher. 'Out—go out! Is this hospital your own village to defile? Have you paid one penny for the roof above you or the drugs in your bellies? Get hence before I spit

upon you!' She brushed them aside with a regal gesture.

'It is best not to go in,' said Dhunpat Rai in Kate's ear. 'There is local holy man in the courtyard, and he is agitating their minds. Also, I myself feel much indisposed.'

'But what does all this mean?' demanded Kate again.

For the hospital was in the hands of a hurrying crowd, who were strapping up bedding and cooking-pots, lamps and linen, calling to one another up and down the staircases in subdued voices, and bringing the sick from the upper wards as ants bring eggs out of a broken hill, six or eight to each man—some holding bunches of marigold flowers in their hands, and pausing to mutter prayers at each step, others peering fearfully into the dispensary, and yet others drawing water from the well and pouring it out around the beds.

In the centre of the courtyard, as naked as the lunatic who had once lived there, sat an ash-smeared, long-haired, eagle-taloned, half-mad, wandering native priest, and waved above his head his buckhorn staff, sharp as a lance at one end, while he chanted in a loud monotonous voice some song that drove the men and women to work more quickly.

As Kate faced him, white with wrath, her

eyes blazing, the song turned to a yelp of fierce hatred.

She dashed among the women swiftly—her own women, who she thought had grown to love her. But their relatives were about them, and Kate was thrust back by a bare-shouldered, loud-voiced dweller of the out-villages in the heart of the desert.

The man had no intention of doing her harm, but the woman of the desert slashed him across the face with her knife, and he withdrew howling.

'Let me speak to them,' said Kate, and the woman beside her quelled the clamour of the crowd with uplifted hands. Only the priest continued his song. Kate strode toward him, her little figure erect and quivering, crying in the vernacular, 'Be silent thou, or I will find means to close thy mouth!'

The man was hushed, and Kate, returning to her women, stood amongst them, and began to speak impassionedly.

'Oh, my women, what have I done?' she cried, still in the vernacular. 'If there is any fault here, who should right it but your friend? Surely you can speak to me day or night.' She threw out her arms. 'Listen, my sisters! Have you gone mad, that you wish to go abroad now, half-cured, sick, or dying? You are free to go at any hour.

Only, for your own sake, and for the sake of your children, do not go before I have cured you, if God so please. It is summer in the desert now, and many of you have come from many *koss* distant.'

'She speaks truth! She speaks truth,' said a voice in the crowd.

'Ay, I do speak truth. And I have dealt fairly by ye. Surely it is upon your heads to tell me the cause of this flight, and not to run away like mice. My sisters, ye are weak and ill, and thy friends do not know what is best for thee. But I know.'

'*Arre!* But what can we do?' cried a feeble voice. 'It is no fault of ours. I, at least, would fain die in peace, but the priest says——'

Then the clamour broke out afresh. 'There are charms written upon the plasters——'

'Why should we become Christians against our will? The wise woman that was sent away asks it.'

'What are the meanings of the red marks on the plasters?'

'Why should we have strange devil-marks stamped upon our bodies? And they burn, too, like the fires of hell.'

'The priest came yesterday—that holy man yonder—and he said it had been revealed to him, sitting among the hills, that this devil's plan was on foot to make us lose our religion——'

'And to send us out of the hospital with marks upon our bodies—ay, and all the babies we should bear in the hospital should have tails like camels, and ears like mules. The wise woman says so; the priest says so.'

'Hush! hush!' cried Kate, in the face of these various words. 'What plasters? What child's talk is this of plasters and devils? Not one child, but many have been born here, and all were comely. Ye know it! This is the word of the worthless woman, whom I sent away because she was torturing you.'

'Nay, but the priest said——'

'What care I for the priest? Has he nursed you? Has he watched by you of nights? Has he sat by your bedside, and smoothed your pillow, and held your hand in pain? Has he taken your children from you and put them to sleep, when he needed an hour's rest?'

'He is a holy man. He has worked miracles. We dare not face the anger of the gods.'

One woman, bolder than the rest, shouted, 'Look at this'; and held before Kate's face one of the prepared mustard-leaves lately ordered from Calcutta, which bore upon the back, in red ink, the maker's name and trade-mark.

'What is this devil's thing?' demanded the woman fiercely.

The woman of the desert caught her by the shoulder, and forced her to her knees.

'Be still, woman without a nose!' she cried, her voice vibrating with passion. 'She is not of thy clay, and thy touch would defile her. Remember thine own dunghill, and speak softly.'

Kate picked up the plaster, smiling.

'And who says there is devil's work in this?' she demanded.

'The holy man, the priest. Surely he should know!'

'Nay, *ye* should know,' said Kate patiently. She understood now, and could pity. 'Ye have worn it. Did it work ye any harm, Pithira?' She pointed directly toward her. 'Thou hast thanked me not once but many times for giving thee relief through this charm. If it was the devil's work, why did it not consume thee?'

'Indeed it burnt very much indeed,' responded the woman, with a nervous laugh.

Kate could not help laughing. 'That is true. I cannot make my drugs pleasant. But ye know that they do good. What do these people, your friends — villagers, camel-drivers, goat-herds — know of English drugs? Are they so wise among their hills, or is the priest so wise, that they can judge for thee here, fifty miles away from them? Do not listen. Oh, do not listen! Tell them

that ye will stay with me, and I will make thee well. I can do no more. It was for that I came. I heard of your misery ten thousand miles away, and it burnt into my heart. Would I have come so far to work you harm? Go back to your beds, my sisters, and bid these foolish people depart.'

There was a murmur among the women, as if of assent and doubt. For a moment the decision swayed one way and the other.

Then the man whose face had been slashed shouted, 'What is the use of talking? Let us take our wives and sisters away! We do not wish to have sons like devils. Give us your voice, O father!' he cried to the priest.

The holy man drew himself up, and swept away Kate's appeal with a torrent of abuse, imprecation, and threats of damnation; and the crowd began to slip past Kate by twos and threes, half carrying and half forcing their kinsfolk with them.

Kate called on the women by name, beseeching them to stay—reasoning, arguing, expostulating. But to no purpose. Many of them were in tears; but the answer from all was the same. They were sorry, but they were only poor women, and they feared the wrath of their husbands.

Minute after minute the wards were depopulated of their occupants, as the priest resumed his song, and began to dance frenziedly in the courtyard.

The stream of colours broke out down the steps into the street, and Kate saw the last of her carefully swathed women borne out into the pitiless sun-glare—only the woman of the desert remaining by her side.

Kate looked on with stony eyes. Her hospital was empty.

XX

Our sister sayeth such and such,
And we must bow to her behests;
Our sister toileth overmuch,
Our little maid that hath no breasts.

A field untilled, a web unwove,
A bud withheld from sun or bee,
An alien in the courts of Love,
And priestess of his shrine is she.

We love her, but we laugh the while,
We laugh, but sobs are mixed with laughter;
Our sister hath no time to smile,
She knows not what must follow after.

Wind of the South, arise and blow,
From beds of spice thy locks shake free;
Breathe on her heart that she may know,
Breathe on her eyes that she may see.

Alas! we vex her with our mirth,
And maze her with most tender scorn,
Who stands beside the gates of Birth,
Herself a child—a child unborn!

Our sister sayeth such and such,
And we must bow to her behests;
Our sister toileth overmuch,
Our little maid that hath no breasts.
From Libretto of Naulahka.

'HAS the miss sahib any orders?' asked Dhunpat Rai, with Oriental calmness, as Kate turned toward the woman of the desert, staying herself against her massive shoulder.

Kate simply shook her head with closed lips.

'It is very sad,' said Dhunpat Rai thoughtfully, as though the matter were one in which he had no interest; 'but it is on account of religious bigotry and intolerance which is prevalent mania in these parts. Once—twice before I have seen the same thing. About powders, sometimes; and once they said that the graduated glasses were holy vessels, and zinc ointment was cow-fat. But I have never seen all the hospital disembark simultaneously. I do not think they will come back; but my appointment is State appointment,' he said, with a bland smile, 'and so I shall draw my offeeshal income as before.'

Kate stared at him. 'Do you mean that they will never come back?' she asked falteringly.

'Oh yes—in time—one or two; two or three

of the men when they are hurt by tigers, or have ophthalmia; but the women—no. Their husbands will never allow. Ask that woman!'

Kate bent a piteous look of inquiry upon the woman of the desert, who, stooping down, took up a little sand, let it trickle through her fingers, brushed her palms together, and shook her head. Kate watched these movements despairingly.

'You see it is all up—no good,' said Dhunpat Rai, not unkindly, but unable to conceal a certain expression of satisfaction in a defeat which the wise had already predicted. 'And now what will your honour do? Shall I lock up dispensary, or will you audit drug accounts now?'

Kate waved him off feebly. 'No, no! Not now. I must think. I must have time. I will send you word. Come, dear one,' she added in the vernacular to the woman of the desert, and hand in hand they went out from the hospital together.

The sturdy Rajput woman caught her up like a child when they were outside, and set her upon her horse, and tramped doggedly alongside, as they set off together toward the house of the missionary.

'And whither wilt thou go?' asked Kate, in the woman's own tongue.

'I was the first of them all,' answered the patient being at her side; 'it is fitting therefore that I should be the last. Where thou goest I will go—and afterward what will fall will fall.'

Kate leaned down and took the woman's hand in hers with a grateful pressure.

At the missionary's gate she had to call up her courage not to break down. She had told Mrs. Estes so much of her hopes for the future, had dwelt so lovingly on all that she meant to teach these helpless creatures, had so constantly conferred with her about the help she had fancied herself to be daily bringing to them, that to own that her work had fallen to this ruin was unspeakably bitter. The thought of Tarvin she fought back. It went too deep.

But, fortunately, Mrs. Estes seemed not to be at home, and a messenger from the Queen Mother awaited Kate to demand her presence at the palace with the Maharaj Kunwar.

The woman of the desert laid a restraining hand on her arm, but Kate shook it off.

'No, no, no! I must go. I must do something,' she exclaimed almost fiercely, 'since there is still some one who will let me. I must have work. It is my only refuge, kind one. Go you on to the palace.'

The woman yielded silently, and trudged on up the dusty road, while Kate sped into the house and to the room where the young Prince lay.

'Lalji,' she said, bending over him, 'do you feel well enough to be lifted into the carriage and taken over to see your mother?'

'I would rather see my father,' responded the boy from the sofa, to which he had been transferred as a reward for the improvement he had made since yesterday. 'I wish to speak to my father upon a most important thing.'

'But your mother hasn't seen you for so long, dear.'

'Very well; I will go.'

'Then I will tell them to get the carriage ready.'

Kate turned to leave the room.

'No, please; I will have my own. Who is without there?'

'Heaven-born, it is I,' answered the deep voice of a trooper.

'*Achcha!* Ride swiftly, and tell them to send down my barouche and escort. If it is not here in ten minutes, tell Sirop Singh that I will cut his pay and blacken his face before all my men. This day I go abroad again.'

'May the mercy of God be upon the heaven-

born for ten thousand years,' responded the voice from without, as the trooper heaved himself into the saddle and clattered away.

By the time that the Prince was ready, a lumbering equipage, stuffed with many cushions, waited at the door. Kate and Mrs. Estes half-helped and half-carried the child into it, though he strove to stand on his feet in the veranda and acknowledge the salute of his escort as befitted a man.

'*Ahi!* I am very weak,' he said, with a little laugh, as they drove to the palace. 'Certainly it seems to myself that I shall never get well in Rhatore.'

Kate put her arm about him and drew him closer to her.

'Kate,' he continued, 'if I ask anything of my father, will you say that that thing is good for me?'

Kate, whose thoughts were still bitter and far away, patted his shoulder vaguely as she lifted her tear-stained eyes toward the red height on which the palace stood. 'How can I tell, Lalji?' She smiled down into his upturned face.

'But it is a most wise thing.'

'Is it?' asked she fondly.

'Yes; I have thought it out by myself. I am myself a Raj Kumar, and I would go to the Raj

Kumar College, where they train the sons of princes to become kings. That is only at Ajmir; but I must go and learn, and fight, and ride with the other princes of Rajputana, and then I shall be altogether a man. I am going to the Raj Kumar College at Ajmir, that I may learn about the world. But you shall see how it is wise. The world looks very big since I have been ill. Kate, how big is the world which you have seen across the Black Water? Where is Tarvin Sahib? I have wished to see him too. Is Tarvin Sahib angry with me or with you?'

He plied her with a hundred questions till they halted before one of the gates in the flank of the palace that led to his mother's wing. The woman of the desert rose from the ground beside it, and held out her arms.

'I heard the message come,' she said to Kate, 'and I knew what was required. Give me the child to carry in. Nay, my Prince, there is no cause for fear. I am of good blood.'

'Women of good blood walk veiled, and do not speak in the streets,' said the child doubtfully.

'One law for thee and thine, and another for me and mine,' the woman answered, with a laugh. 'We who earn our bread by toil cannot go veiled, but our fathers lived before us for many hundred

years, even as did thine, heaven-born. Come then, the white fairy cannot carry thee so tenderly as I can.'

She put her arms about him, and held him to her breast as easily as though he had been a three-year-old child. He leaned back luxuriously, and waved a wasted hand; the grim gate grated on its hinges as it swung back, and they entered together—the woman, the child, and the girl.

There was no lavish display of ornament in that part of the palace. The gaudy tilework on the walls had flaked and crumbled away in many places, the shutters lacked paint and hung awry, and there was litter and refuse in the courtyard behind the gates. A queen who has lost the King's favour loses much else as well in material comforts.

A door opened and a voice called. The three plunged into half darkness, and traversed a long, upward-sloping passage, floored with shining white stucco as smooth as marble, which communicated with the Queen's apartments. The Maharaj Kunwar's mother lived by preference in one long, low room that faced to the north-east, that she might press her face against the marble tracery and dream of her home across the sands, eight hundred miles away, among the Kulu hills. The hum of the crowded palace could not be heard there, and

the footsteps of her few waiting-women alone broke the silence.

The woman of the desert, with the Prince hugged more closely to her breast, moved through the labyrinth of empty rooms, narrow staircases, and roofed courtyards with the air of a caged panther. Kate and the Prince were familiar with the dark and the tortuousness, the silence and the sullen mystery. To the one it was part and parcel of the horrors amid which she had elected to move; to the other it was his daily life.

At last the journey ended. Kate lifted a heavy curtain, as the Prince called for his mother; and the Queen, rising from a pile of white cushions by the window, cried passionately—

'Is it well with the child?'

The Prince struggled to the floor from the woman's arms, and the Queen hung sobbing over him, calling him a thousand endearing names, and fondling him from head to foot. The child's reserve melted—he had striven for a moment to carry himself as a man of the Rajput race: that is to say, as one shocked beyond expression at any public display of emotion—and he laughed and wept in his mother's arms. The woman of the desert drew her hand across her eyes, muttering to herself, and Kate turned to look out of the window.

'How shall I give you thanks?' said the Queen at last. 'Oh, my son—my little son—child of my heart, the gods and she have made thee well again. But who is that yonder?'

Her eyes fell for the first time on the woman of the desert, where the latter stood by the doorway draped in dull-red.

'She carried me here from the carriage,' said the Prince, 'saying that she was a Rajput of good blood.'

'I am of Chohan blood—a Rajput and a mother of Rajputs,' said the woman simply, still standing. 'The white fairy worked a miracle upon my man. He was sick in the head and did not know me. It is true that he died, but before the passing of the breath he knew me and called me by my name.'

'And *she* carried thee!' said the Queen, with a shiver, drawing the Prince closer to her, for, like all Indian women, she counted the touch and glance of a widow things of evil omen.

The woman fell at the Queen's feet. 'Forgive me, forgive me,' she cried. 'I had borne three little ones, and the gods took them all and my man at the last. It was good—it was so good—to hold a child in my arms again. Thou canst forgive,' she wailed; 'thou art so rich in thy son, and I am only a widow.'

'And I a widow in life,' said the Queen, under

her breath. 'Of a truth, I should forgive. Rise thou.'

The woman lay still where she had fallen, clutching at the Queen's naked feet.

'Rise, then, my sister,' the Queen whispered.

'We of the fields,' murmured the woman of the desert, 'we do not know how to speak to the great people. If my words are rough, does the Queen forgive me?'

'Indeed I forgive. Thy speech is softer than that of the hill-women of Kulu, but some of the words are new.'

'I am of the desert—a herder of camels, a milker of goats. What should I know of the speech of courts? Let the white fairy speak for me.'

Kate listened with an alien ear. Now that she had discharged her duty, her freed mind went back to Tarvin's danger and the shame and overthrow of an hour ago. She saw the women in her hospital slipping away one by one, her work unravelled, and all hope of good brought to wreck; and she saw Tarvin dying atrocious deaths, and, as she felt, by her hand.

'What is it?' she asked wearily, as the woman plucked at her skirt. Then to the Queen, 'This is a woman who alone of all those whom I tried to benefit remained at my side to-day, Queen.'

'There has been a talk in the palace,' said the Queen, her arm round the Prince's neck, 'a talk that trouble had come to your hospital, sahiba.'

'There is no hospital now,' Kate answered grimly.

'You promised to take me there, Kate, some day,' the Prince said in English.

'The women were fools,' said the woman of the desert quietly, from her place on the ground. 'A mad priest told them a lie—that there was a charm among the drugs——'

'Deliver us from all evil spirits and exorcisms,' the Queen murmured.

'A charm among her drugs that she handles with her own hands, and so forsooth, sahiba, they must run out shrieking that their children will be misborn apes and their chicken-souls given to the devils. *Aho!* They will know in a week, not one or two, but many, whither their souls go: for they will die—the corn and the corn in the ear together.'

Kate shivered. She knew too well that the woman spoke the truth.

'But the drugs!' began the Queen. 'Who knows what powers there may be in the drugs?' she laughed nervously, glancing at Kate.

'*Dekho!* Look at her,' said the woman, with

quiet scorn. 'She is a girl and naught else. What could she do to the Gates of Life?'

'She has made my son whole, therefore she is my sister,' said the Queen.

'She caused my man to speak to me before the death hour; therefore I am her servant as well as thine, sahiba,' said the other.

The Prince looked up in his mother's face curiously. 'She calls thee "thou,"' he said, as though the woman did not exist. 'That is not seemly between a villager and a queen, thee and thou!'

'We be both women, little son. Stay still in my arms. Oh, it is good to feel thee here again, worthless one.'

'The heaven-born looks as frail as dried maize,' said the woman quickly.

'A dried monkey, rather,' returned the Queen, dropping her lips on the child's head. Both mothers spoke aloud and with emphasis, that the gods, jealous of human happiness, might hear and take for truth the disparagement that veils deepest love.

'*Aho*, my little monkey is dead,' said the Prince, moving restlessly. 'I need another one. Let me go into the palace and find another monkey.'

'He must not wander into the palace from this

chamber,' said the Queen passionately, turning to Kate. 'Thou art all too weak, beloved. O miss sahib, he must not go.' She knew by experience that it was fruitless to cross her son's will.

'It is my order,' said the Prince, without turning his head. 'I will go.'

'Stay with us, beloved,' said Kate. She was wondering whether the hospital could be dragged together again, after three months, and whether it was possible she might have overrated the danger to Nick.

'I go,' said the Prince, breaking from his mother's arms. 'I am tired of this talk.'

'Does the Queen give leave?' asked the woman of the desert under her breath. The Queen nodded, and the Prince found himself caught between two brown arms, against whose strength it was impossible to struggle.

'Let me go, *widow*!' he shouted furiously.

'It is not good for a Rajput to make light of a mother of Rajputs, my king,' was the unmoved answer. 'If the young steer does not obey the cow, he learns obedience from the yoke. The heaven-born is not strong. He will fall among those passages and stairs. He will stay here. When the rage has left his body he will be weaker than before. Even now'—the large bright eyes bent themselves on the face of the child—'even

now,' the calm voice continued, 'the rage is going. One moment more, heaven-born, and thou wilt be a prince no longer, but only a little, little child, such as I have borne. *Ahi*, such as I shall never bear again.'

With the last words the Prince's head nodded forward on her shoulder. The gust of passion had spent itself, leaving him, as she had foreseen, weak to sleep.

'Shame — oh, shame!' he muttered thickly. 'Indeed I do not wish to go. Let me sleep.'

She began to pat him on the shoulder, till the Queen put forward hungry arms, and took back her own again, and laying the child on a cushion at her side, she spread the skirt of her long muslin robe over him, and looked long at her treasure. The woman crouched down on the floor. Kate sat on a cushion, and listened to the ticking of the cheap American clock in a niche in the wall. The voice of a woman singing a song came muffled and faint through many walls. The dry wind of noon sighed through the fretted screens of the window, and she could hear the horses of the escort swishing their tails and champing their bits in the courtyard a hundred feet below. She listened, thinking ever of Tarvin in growing terror. The Queen leaned over her son more closely, her eyes humid with mother love.

'He is asleep,' she said at last. 'What was the talk about his monkey, miss sahib?'

'It died,' Kate said, and spurred herself to the lie. 'I think it had eaten bad fruit in the garden.'

'In the garden?' said the Queen quickly.

'Yes, in the garden.'

The woman of the desert turned her eyes from one woman to the other. These were matters too high for her, and she began timidly to rub the Queen's feet.

'Monkeys often die?' she observed. 'I have seen as it were a pestilence among the monkey folk over there at Banswarra.'

'In what fashion did it die?' insisted the Queen.

'I—I do not know,' Kate stammered, and there was another long silence as the hot afternoon wore on.

'Miss Kate, what do you think about my son?' whispered the Queen. 'Is he well, or is he not well?'

'He is not very well. In time he will grow stronger, but it would be better if he could go away for a while.'

The Queen bowed her head quietly. 'I have thought of that also many times sitting here alone; and it was the tearing out of my own heart from

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my breast. Yes, it would be well if he were to go away. But'—she stretched out her hands despairingly towards the sunshine—'what do I know of the world where he will go, and how can I be sure that he will be safe? Here—even here' . . . She checked herself suddenly. 'Since you have come, Miss Kate, my heart has known a little comfort, but I do not know when you will go away again.'

'I cannot guard the child against every evil,' Kate replied, covering her face with her hands; 'but send him away from this place as swiftly as may be. In God's name let him go away.'

'*Such hai! Such hai!* It is the truth, the truth!' The Queen turned from Kate to the woman at her feet.

'Thou hast borne three?' she said.

'Yea, three, and one other that never drew breath. They were all men-children,' said the woman of the desert.

'And the gods took them?'

'Of smallpox one, and fever the two others.'

'Art thou certain that it was the gods?'

'I was with them always till the end.'

'Thy man, then, was all thine own?'

'We were only two, he and I. Among our villages the men are poor, and one wife suffices.'

'*Arré!* They are rich among the villages. Listen now. If a co-wife had sought the lives of those three of thine——'

'I would have killed her. What else?' The woman's nostrils dilated and her hand went swiftly to her bosom.

'And if in place of three there had been one only, the delight of thy eyes, and thou hadst known that thou shouldst never bear another, and the co-wife working in darkness had sought for that life? What then?'

'I would have slain her—but with no easy death. At her man's side and in his arms I would have slain her. If she died before my vengeance arrived I would seek for her in hell.'

'Thou canst go out in the sunshine and walk in the streets and no man turns his head,' said the Queen bitterly. 'Thy hands are free and thy face is uncovered. What if thou wert a slave among slaves, a stranger among stranger people, and'—the voice dropped—'dispossessed of the favour of thy lord?'

The woman, stooping, kissed the pale feet under her hands.

'Then I would not wear myself with strife, but, remembering that a man-child may grow into a king, would send that child away beyond the power of the co-wife.'

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'Is it so easy to cut away the hand?' said the Queen, sobbing.

'Better the hand than the heart, sahiba. Who could guard such a child in this place?'

The Queen pointed to Kate. 'She came from far off, and she has once already brought him back from death.'

'Her drugs are good and her skill is great, but —thou knowest she is but a maiden, who has known neither gain nor loss. It may be that I am luckless, and that my eyes are evil—thus did not my man say last autumn—but it may be. Yet I know the pain at the breast and the yearning over the child new-born—as thou hast known it.'

'As I have known it.'

'My house is empty and I am a widow and childless, and never again shall a man call me to wed.'

'As I am—as I am.'

'Nay, the little one is left, whatever else may go; and the little one must be well guarded. If there is any jealousy against the child it were not well to keep him in this hotbed. Let him go out.'

'But whither? Miss Kate, dost thou know? The world is all dark to us who sit behind the curtain.'

'I know that the child of his own motion

desires to go to the Princes' School in Ajmir. He has told me that much,' said Kate, who had lost no word of the conversation from her place on the cushion, bowed forward with her chin supported in her hands. 'It will be only for a year or two.'

The Queen laughed a little through her tears. 'Only a year or two, Miss Kate. Dost thou know how long is one night when he is not here?'

'And he can return at call; but no cry will bring back mine own. Only a year or two. The world is dark also to those who do not sit behind the curtain, sahiba. It is no fault of hers. How should she know?' said the woman of the desert under her breath to the Queen.

Against her will, Kate began to feel annoyed at this persistent exclusion of herself from the talk, and the assumption that she, with her own great trouble upon her, whose work was pre-eminently to deal with sorrow, must have no place in this double grief.

'How should I *not* know?' said Kate impetuously. 'Do I not know pain? Is it not my life?'

'Not yet,' said the Queen quietly. 'Neither pain nor joy. Miss Kate, thou art very wise, and I am only a woman who has never stirred beyond the palace walls. But I am wiser than

thou, for I know that which thou dost not know, though thou hast given back my son to me, and to this woman her husband's speech. How shall I repay thee all I owe?'

'Let her hear truth,' said the woman under her breath. 'We be all three women here, sahiba —dead leaf, flowering tree, and the blossom unopened.'

The Queen caught Kate's hands and gently pulled her forward till her head fell on the Queen's knees. Wearied with the emotions of the morning, unutterably tired in body and spirit, the girl had no desire to lift it. The small hands put her hair back from her forehead, and the full dark eyes, worn with much weeping, looked into her own. The woman of the desert flung an arm round her waist.

'Listen, my sister,' began the Queen, with an infinite tenderness. 'There is a proverb among my own people, in the mountains of the north, that a rat found a piece of turmeric, and opened a druggist's shop. Even so with the pain that thou dost know and heal, beloved. Thou art not angry? Nay, thou must not take offence. Forget that thou art white, and I black, and remember only that we three be sisters. Little sister, with us women 'tis thus, and no other way. From all, except such as have borne a child, the

world is hid. I make my prayers trembling to such and such a god, who thou sayest is black stone, and I tremble at the gusts of the night because I believe that the devils ride by my windows at such hours; and I sit here in the dark knitting wool and preparing sweetmeats that come back untasted from my lord's table. And thou coming from ten thousand leagues away, very wise and fearing nothing, hast taught me, oh, ten thousand things. Yet thou art the child, and I am still the mother, and what I know thou canst not know, and the wells of my happiness thou canst not fathom, nor the bitter waters of my sorrow till thou hast tasted sorrow and grief alike. I have told thee of the child—all and more than all, thou sayest? Little sister, I have told thee less than the beginning of my love for him, because I knew that thou couldst not understand. I have told thee my sorrows—all and more than all, thou sayest, when I laid my head against thy breast? How could I tell thee all? Thou art a maiden, and the heart in thy bosom, beneath my heart, betrayed in its very beat that it did not understand. Nay, that woman there, coming from without, knows more of me than thee? And they taught thee in a school, thou hast told me, all manner of healing, and there is no disease in life that thou dost not understand? Little sister, how couldst

thou understand life that hast never given it? Hast thou ever felt the tug of the child at the breast? Nay, what need to blush? Hast thou? I know thou hast not. Though I heard thy speech for the first time, and looking from the window saw thee walking, I should know. And the others—my sisters in the world—know also. But they do not all speak to thee as I do. When the life quickens under the breast, they, waking in the night, hear all the earth walking to that measure. Why should they tell thee? To-day the hospital has broken from under thee. Is it not so? And the women went out one by one? And what didst thou say to them?'

The woman of the desert, answering for her, spoke. 'She said, "Come back, and I will make ye well."'

'And by what oath did she affirm her words?'

'There was no oath,' said the woman of the desert; 'she stood in the gate and called.'

'And upon what should a maiden call to bring wavering women back again? The toil that she has borne for their sake? They cannot see it. But of the pains that a woman has shared with them, a woman knows. There was no child in thy arms. The mother look was not in thy eyes. By what magic, then, wouldst thou speak to

women? There was a charm among the drugs, they said, and their children would be misshapen. What didst thou know of the springs of life and death to teach them otherwise? It is written in the books of thy school, I know, that such things cannot be. But we women do not read books. It is not from them that we learn of life. How should such an one prevail, unless the gods help her—and the gods are very far away. Thou hast given thy life to the helping of women. Little sister, when wilt thou also be a woman?'

The voice ceased. Kate's head was buried deep in the Queen's lap. She let it lie there without stirring.

'Ay!' said the woman of the desert. 'The mark of coverture has been taken from my head, my glass bangles are broken on my arm, and I am unlucky to meet when a man sets forth on a journey. Till I die I must be alone, earning my bread alone, and thinking of the dead. But though I knew that it was to come again, at the end of one year instead of ten, I would still thank the gods that have given me love and a child. Will the miss sahib take this in payment for all she did for my man? "A wandering priest, a childless woman, and a stone in the water are of one blood." So says the talk of our people. What will the miss sahib do now? The Queen has

spoken the truth. The gods and thy own wisdom, which is past the wisdom of a maid, have helped thee so far, as I, who was with thee always, have seen. The gods have warned thee that their help is at an end. What remains? Is this work for such as thou? Is it not as the Queen says? She, sitting here alone, and seeing nothing, has seen that which I, moving with thee among the sick day by day, have seen and known. Little sister, is it not so?'

Kate lifted her head slowly from the Queen's knee, and rose.

'Take the child, and let us go,' she said hoarsely.

The merciful darkness of the room hid her face.

'Nay,' said the Queen, 'this woman shall take him. Go thou back alone.'

Kate vanished.

XXI

The Law whereby my lady moves
  Was never Law to me,
But 'tis enough that she approves
  Whatever Law it be.

For in that Law, and by that Law,
  My constant course I'll steer;
Not that I heed or deem it dread,
  But that she holds it dear.

Tho' Asia sent for my content
  Her richest argosies,
Those would I spurn, and bid return,
  If that should give her ease.

With equal heart I'd watch depart
  Each splicèd sail from sight,
Sans bitterness, desiring less
  Great gear than her delight.

Yet such am I, yea such am I—
  Sore bond and freest free,—
The Law that sways my lady's ways
  Is mystery to me!

TO sit still, and to keep sitting still, is the first lesson that the young jockey must learn. Tarvin was learning it in bitterness of spirit. For the sake of his town, for the sake of his love, and, above all, for the sake of his love's life, he must go. The town was waiting, his horse was saddled at the door, but his love would not come. He must sit still.

The burning desert wind blew through the open veranda as remorselessly as Sitabhai's hate. Looking out, he saw nothing but the city asleep in the sunshine and the wheeling kites above it. Yet when evening fell, and a man might be able by bold riding to escape to the railway, certain shrouded figures would creep from the walls and take up their position within easy gunshot of the rest-house. One squatted at each point of the compass, and between them, all night long, came and went a man on horseback. Tarvin could hear the steady beat of the hoofs as he went his rounds, and the sound did not give him fresh hope. But for Kate—but for Kate, he repeated to himself, he would have been long since beyond reach of horse or bullet. The hours were very slow, and as he sat and watched the shadows grow and shorten it seemed to him, as it had seemed so often before, that this and no other was the moment that Topaz would choose to throw her chances from her.

He had lost already, he counted, eight-and-forty precious hours, and, so far as he could see, the remainder of the year might be spent in an equally unprofitable fashion.

Meantime Kate lay exposed to every imaginable danger. Sitabhai was sure to assume that he had wrested the necklace from her for the sake of the 'frail white girl'; she had said as much on the dam. It *was* for Kate's sake, in a measure; but Tarvin reflected bitterly that an Oriental had no sense of proportion, and, like the snake, strikes first at that which is nearest. And Kate? How in the world was he to explain the case to her? He had told her of danger about her path as well as his own, and she had decided to face that danger. For her courage and devotion he loved her; but her obstinacy made him grit his teeth. There was but one grimly comical element in the terrible jumble. What would the King say to Sitabhai when he discovered that she had lost the Luck of the State? In what manner would she veil that loss; and, above all, into what sort of royal rage would she fall? Tarvin shook his head meditatively. 'It's quite bad enough for me,' he said, 'just about as bad as it can possibly be made; but I have a wandering suspicion that it may be unwholesome for Juggut. Yes! I can spare time to be very sorry for Juggut. My fat friend, you

should have held straight that first time, outside the city walls!'

He rose and looked out into the sunlight, wondering which of the scattered vagrants by the roadside might be an emissary from the palace. A man lay apparently asleep by the side of his camel near the road that ran to the city. Tarvin stepped out casually from the veranda, and saw, as soon as he was fairly in the open, that the sleeper rolled round to the other side of his beast. He strolled forward a few paces. The sunlight glinted above the back of the camel on something that shone like silver. Tarvin marched straight toward the glitter, his pistol in his hand. The man, when he came up to him, was buried in innocent slumber. Under the fold of his garment peered the muzzle of a new and very clean rifle.

'Looks as if Sitabhai was calling out the militia, and supplying them with outfits from her private armoury. Juggut's gun was new, too,' said Tarvin, standing over the sleeper. 'But this man knows more about guns than Juggut. Hi!' He stooped down and stirred the man up with the muzzle of his revolver. 'I'm afraid I must trouble you for that gun. And tell the lady to drop it, will you? It won't pay.'

The man understood the unspoken eloquence

of the pistol, and nothing more. He gave up his gun sullenly enough, and moved away, lashing his camel spitefully.

'Now, I wonder how many more of her army I shall have to disarm,' said Tarvin, retracing his steps, the captured gun over his shoulder. 'I wonder—no, I won't believe that she would dare to do anything to Kate! She knows enough of me to be sure that I'd blow her and her old palace into to-morrow. If she's half the woman she pretends to be, she'll reckon with me before she goes much further.'

In vain he attempted to force himself into this belief. Sitabhai had shown him what sort of thing her mercy might be, and Kate might have tasted it ere this. To go to her now—to be maimed or crippled at the least if he went to her now—was impossible. Yet, he decided that he would go. He returned hastily to Fibby, whom he had left not three minutes before flicking flies off in the sunshine at the back of the rest-house. But Fibby lay on his side groaning piteously, hamstrung and dying.

Tarvin could hear his groom industriously polishing a bit round the corner, and when the man came up in response to his call he flung himself down by the side of the horse, howling with grief.

'An enemy hath done this, an enemy hath done this!' he clamoured. 'My beautiful brown horse that never did harm except when he kicked through fulness of meat! Where shall I find a new service if I let my charge die thus?'

'I wish I knew! I wish I knew!' said Tarvin, puzzled, and almost despairing. 'There'd be a bullet through one black head, if I were just a little surer. Get up, you! Fibby, old man, I forgive you all your sins. You were a good old boy, and—here's luck.'

The blue smoke enveloped Fibby's head for an instant, the head fell like a hammer, and the good horse was out of his pain. The groom, rising, rent the air with grief, till Tarvin kicked him out of the pickets and bade him begone. Then it was noticeable that his cries ceased suddenly, and, as he retreated into his mud-house to tie up his effects, he smiled and dug up some silver from a hole under his bedstead.

Tarvin, dismounted, looked east, west, north, south for help, as Sitabhai had looked on the dam. A wandering gang of gipsies with their lean bullocks and yelping dogs turned an angle of the city wall, and rested like a flock of unclean birds by the city gate. The sight in itself was not unusual, but city regulations forbade camping within a quarter of a mile of the walls.

'Some of the lady's poor relatives, I suppose. They have blocked the way through the gate pretty well. Now, if I were to make a bolt of it to the missionary's they'd have me, wouldn't they?' muttered Tarvin to himself. 'On the whole, I've seen prettier professions than trading with Eastern queens. They don't seem to understand the rules of the game.'

At that moment a cloud of dust whirled through the gipsy camp, as the escort of the Maharaj Kunwar, clearing the way for the barouche, scattered the dark band to the left and right. Tarvin wondered what this might portend. The escort halted with the customary rattle of accoutrements at the rest-house door, the barouche behind them. A single trooper, two hundred yards or more in the rear, lifted his voice in a deferential shout as he pursued the carriage. He was answered by a chuckle from the escort, and two shrill screams of delight from the occupants of the barouche.

A child whom Tarvin had never before seen stood upright in the back of the carriage, and hurled a torrent of abuse in the vernacular at the outpaced trooper. Again the escort laughed.

'Tarvin Sahib! Tarvin Sahib!' piped the Maharaj Kunwar. 'Come and look at us.'

For a moment Tarvin fancied this a fresh device

of the enemy; but reassured by the sight of his old and trusted ally, the Maharaj, he stepped forward.

'Prince,' he said, as he took his hand, 'you ought not to be out.'

'Oh, it is all right,' said the young man hastily, though his little pale face belied it. 'I gave the order and we came. Miss Kate gives me orders; but she took me over to the palace, and there I give orders. This is Umr Singh—my brother, the little Prince; but *I* shall be King.'

The second child raised his eyes slowly and looked full at Tarvin. The eyes and the low broad forehead were those of Sitabhai, and the mouth closed firmly over the little pearl-like teeth, as his mother's mouth had closed in the conflict on the Dungar Talao.

'He is from the other side of the palace,' answered the Maharaj, still in English. 'From the other side, where I must not go. But when I was in the palace I went to him—ha, ha, Tarvin Sahib—and he was killing a goat. Look! His hands are all red now.'

Umr Singh opened a tiny palm at a word from the Maharaj in the vernacular, and flung it outward at Tarvin. It was dark with dried blood, and a bearded whisper ran among the escort. The commandant turned in his saddle, and, nodding at

Tarvin, muttered, '*Sitabhai.*' Tarvin caught the word, and it was sufficient for him. Providence had sent him help out of a clear sky. He framed a plan instantly.

'But how did you come here, you young imps?' he demanded.

'Oh, there are only women in the palace yonder, and I am a Rajput and a man. He cannot speak any English at all,' he added, pointing to his companion; 'but when we have played together I have told him about you, Tarvin Sahib, and about the day you picked me out of my saddle, and he wished to come too, to see all the things you show me, so I gave the order very quietly, and we came out of the little door together. And so we are here! *Salaam, baba,*' he said patronisingly to the child at his side, and the child, slowly and gravely, raised his hand to his forehead, still gazing with fixed, incurious eyes on the stranger. Then he whispered something that made the Maharaj Kunwar laugh. 'He says,' said the Maharaj Kunwar, 'that you are not so big as he thought. His mother told him that you were stronger than any man, but some of these troopers are bigger than you.'

'Well, what do you want me to do?' asked Tarvin.

'Show him your gun, and how you shoot

rupees, and what you do that makes horses quiet when they kick, and all those things.'

'All right,' said Tarvin. 'But I can't show them here. Come over to Mr. Estes with me.'

'I do not like to go there. My monkey is dead. And I do not think Kate would like to see us. She is always crying now. She took me up to the palace yesterday, and this morning I went to her again; but she would not see me.'

Tarvin could have hugged the child for the blessed assurance that Kate at least still lived. 'Isn't she at the hospital, then?' he asked thickly.

'Oh, the hospital has all gone *phut*. There are no women now. They all ran away.'

'No!' cried Tarvin. 'Say that again, little man. What for?'

'Devils,' said the Maharaj Kunwar briefly. 'What do I know? It was some women's talk. Show him how you ride, Tarvin Sahib.'

Again Umr Singh whispered to his companion, and put one leg over the side of the barouche. 'He says he will ride in front of you, as I told him I did,' interpreted the Prince. 'Gurdit Singh, dismount!'

A trooper flung himself out of the saddle on the word, and stood to attention at the horse's head. Tarvin, smiling to himself at the perfection

of his opportunity, said nothing, but leapt into the saddle, picked Umr Singh out of his barouche, and placed him carefully before him.

'Sitabhai would be rather restless if she could see me,' he murmured to himself, as he tucked his arm round the lithe little figure. 'I don't think there will be any Juggutting while I carry this young man in front of me.'

As the escort opened to allow Tarvin to take his place at their head, a wandering priest, who had been watching the episode from a little distance, turned and shouted with all the strength of his lungs across the plain, in the direction of the city. The cry was taken up by unseen voices, passed on to the city walls, and died away on the sands beyond.

Umr Singh smiled, as the horse began to trot, and urged Tarvin to go faster. This the Maharaj forbade. He wished to see the sight comfortably from his seat in the barouche. As he passed the gipsy camp, men and women threw themselves down on the sands, crying, '*Jai! Jungle da badshah jai!*' and the faces of the troopers darkened.

'That means,' cried the Maharaj Kunwar, 'Victory to the King of the Desert. I have no money to give them. Have you, Tarvin Sahib?'

In his joy at being now safely on his way to Kate, Tarvin could have flung everything he possessed to the crowd—almost the Naulahka itself. He emptied a handful of copper and small silver among them, and the cry rose again, but bitter laughter was mingled with it, and the gipsy folk called to each other, mocking. The Maharaj Kunwar's face turned scarlet. He leaned forward listening for an instant, and then shouted, 'By Indur, it is for *him*! Scatter their tents!' At a wave of his hand the escort, wheeling, plunged through the camp in line, driving the light ash of the fires up in clouds, slashing the donkeys with the flat of their swords until they stampeded, and carrying away the frail brown tents on the butts of their reversed lances.

Tarvin looked on contentedly at the dispersal of the group, which he knew would have stopped him if he had been alone.

Umr Singh bit his lip. Then, turning to the Maharaj Kunwar, he smiled, and put forward from his belt the hilt of his sword in sign of fealty.

'It is just, my brother,' he said in the vernacular. 'But I'—here he raised his voice a little—'would not drive the gipsy folk too far. They always return.'

'Ay,' cried a voice from the huddled crowd,

watching the wreck of the camp, significantly, 'gipsies always return, my King.'

'So does a dog,' said the Maharaj, between his teeth. 'Both are kicked. Drive on.'

And a pillar of dust came to Estes's house, Tarvin riding in safety in the midst of it.

Telling the boys to play until he came out, he swept into the house, taking the steps two at a time, and discovered Kate in a dark corner of the parlour with a bit of sewing in her hand. As she looked up he saw that she was crying.

'Nick!' she exclaimed voicelessly. '*Nick!*' He had stopped hesitating on the threshold; she dropped her work, and rose breathless. 'You have come back! It is you! You are alive!'

Tarvin smiled, and held out his arms. 'Come and see!' She took a step forward.

'Oh, I was afraid——'

'Come!'

She went doubtfully toward him. He caught her fast, and held her in his arms.

For a long minute she let her head lie on his breast. Then she looked up. 'This isn't what I meant,' she protested.

'Oh, don't try to improve on it!' Tarvin said hastily.

'She tried to poison me. I was sure when I

heard nothing that she must have killed you. I fancied horrible things.'

'Poor child! And your hospital has gone wrong! You have been having a hard time. But we will change all that. We must leave as soon as you can get ready. I've nipped her claws for a moment; I'm holding a hostage. But we can't keep that up for ever. We must get away.'

'We!' she repeated feebly.

'Well, do you want to go alone?'

She smiled as she released herself. 'I want you to.'

'And you?'

'I'm not worth thinking of. I have failed. Everything I meant to do has fallen about me in a heap. I feel burnt out, Nick—burnt out!'

'All right! We'll put in new works and launch you on a fresh system. That's what I want. There shall be nothing to remind you that you ever saw Rhatore, dear.'

'It was a mistake,' she said.

'What?'

'Everything. My coming. My thinking I could do it. It's not a girl's work. It's my work, perhaps; but it's not for me. I have given it up, Nick. Take me home.'

Tarvin gave an unbecoming shout of joy, and folded her in his arms again. He told her that

they must be married at once, and start that night, if she could manage it; and Kate, dreading what might befall him, assented doubtfully. She spoke of preparations; but Tarvin said that they would prepare after they had done it. They could buy things at Bombay—stacks of things. He was sweeping her forward with the onrush of his extempore plans, when she said suddenly, 'But what of the dam, Nick? You can't leave that.'

'Shucks!' exclaimed Tarvin heartily. 'You don't suppose there's any gold in the old river, do you?'

She recoiled quickly from his arms, staring at him in accusation and reproach.

'Do you mean that you have always known that there was no gold there?' she asked.

Tarvin pulled himself together quickly; but not so quickly that she did not catch the confession in his eye.

'I see you have,' she said coldly.

Tarvin measured the crisis which had suddenly descended on him out of the clouds; he achieved an instantaneous change of front, and met her smiling.

'Certainly,' he said; 'I have been working it as a blind.'

'A blind?' she repeated. 'To cover what?'

'You.'

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'What do you mean?' she inquired, with a look in her eyes which made him uncomfortable.

'The Indian Government allows no one to remain in the State without a definite purpose. I couldn't tell Colonel Nolan that I had come courting you, could I?'

'I don't know. But you could have avoided taking the Maharajah's money to carry out this—this plan. An honest man would have avoided that.'

'Oh, look here!' exclaimed Tarvin.

'How could you cheat the King into thinking that there was a reason for your work, how could you let him give you the labour of a thousand men, how could you take his money? O Nick!'

He gazed at her for a vacant and hopeless minute. 'Why, Kate,' he exclaimed, 'do you know you are talking of the most stupendous joke the Indian empire has witnessed since the birth of time?'

This was pretty good, but it was not good enough. He plunged for a stronger hold as she answered, with a perilous little note of breakdown in her voice, 'You make it worse.'

'Well, your sense of humour never was your strongest point, you know, Kate.' He took the seat next her, leaned over and took her hand, as he went on. 'Doesn't it strike you as rather

amusing, though, after all, to rip up half a state to be near a very small little girl—a very sweet, very extra lovely little girl, but still a rather tiny little girl in proportion to the size of the Amet valley? Come—doesn't it?'

'Is that all you have to say?' asked she. Tarvin turned pale. He knew the tone of finality he heard in her voice; it went with a certain look of scorn when she spoke of any form of moral baseness that moved her. He recognised his condemnation in it and shuddered. In the moment that passed, while he still kept silence, he recognised this for the crisis of his life. Then he took strong hold of himself, and said quietly, easily, unscrupulously—

'Why, you don't suppose that I'm not going to ask the Maharajah for his bill, do you?'

She gasped a little. Her acquaintance with Tarvin did not help her to follow his dizzying changes of front. His bird's skill to make his level flight, his reeling dips and circling returns upon himself, all seem part of a single impulse, must ever remain confusing to her. But she rightly believed in his central intention to do the square thing, if he could find out what it was; and her belief in his general strength helped her not to see at this moment that he was deriving his sense of the square thing from herself. She could

not know, and probably could not have imagined, how little his own sense of the square thing had to do with any system of morality, and how entirely he must always define morality as what pleased Kate. Other women liked confections; she preferred morality, and he meant she should have it, if he had to turn pirate to get it for her.

'You didn't think I wasn't paying for the show?' he pursued bravely; but in his heart he was saying, 'She loathes it. She hates it. Why didn't I think; why didn't I think?' He added aloud, 'I had my fun, and now I've got you. You're both cheap at the price, and I'm going to step up and pay it like a little man. You must know that.'

His smile met no answering smile. He mopped his forehead and stared anxiously at her. All the easiness in the world couldn't make him sure what she would say next. She said nothing, and he had to go on desperately, with a cold fear gathering about his heart. 'Why, it's just like me, isn't it, Kate, to work a scheme on the old Rajah? It's like a man who owns a mine that's turning out $2000 a month, to rig a game out in this desert country to do a confiding Indian Prince out of a few thousand rupees?' He advanced this recently inspired conception of his conduct with an air of immemorial familiarity, born of desperation.

'What mine?' she asked, with dry lips.

'The "Lingering Lode," of course. You've heard me speak of it?'

'Yes, but I didn't know——'

'That it was doing that? Well, it is—right along. Want to see the assay?'

'No,' she answered. 'No. But that makes you——Why, but, Nick, that makes you——'

'A rich man? Moderately, while the lead holds out. Too rich for petty larceny, I guess.'

He was joking for his life. The heart-sickening seriousness of his unseriousness was making a hole in his head; the tension was too much for him. In the mad fear of that moment his perceptions doubled their fineness. Something went through him as he said 'larceny.' Then his heart stopped. A sure, awful, luminous perception leaped upon him, and he knew himself for lost.

If she hated this, what would she say to the other? Innocent, successful, triumphant, even gay it seemed to him; but what to her? He turned sick.

Kate or the Naulahka. He must choose. The Naulahka or Kate?

'Don't make light of it,' she was saying. 'You would be just as honest if you couldn't afford it, Nick. Ah,' she went on, laying her hand on his lightly, in mute petition for having

even seemed to doubt him, 'I know you, Nick! You like to make the better seem the worse reason; you like to pretend to be wicked. But who is so honest? O Nick! I knew you had to be true. If you weren't, everything else would be wrong.'

He took her in his arms. 'Would it, little girl?' he asked, looking down at her. 'We must keep the other things right, then, at any expense.'

He heaved a deep sigh as he stooped and kissed her.

'Have you such a thing as a box?' he asked, after a long pause.

'Any sort of box?' asked Kate bewilderedly.

'No—well, it ought to be the finest box in the world, but I suppose one of those big grape boxes will do. It isn't every day that one sends presents to a queen.'

Kate handed him a large chip box in which long green grapes from Kabul had been packed. Discoloured cotton wool lay at the bottom.

'That was sold at the door the other day,' she said. 'Is it big enough?'

Tarvin turned away without answering, emptied something that clicked like a shower of pebbles upon the wool, and sighed deeply. Topaz was in that box. The voice of the Maharaj Kunwar lifted itself from the next room.

'Tarvin Sahib—Kate, we have eaten all the fruit, and now we want to do something else.'

'One moment, little man,' said Tarvin. With his back still toward Kate, he drew his hand caressingly, for the last time, over the blazing heap at the bottom of the box, fondling the stones one by one. The great green emerald pierced him, he thought, with a reproachful gaze. A mist crept into his eyes: the diamond was too bright. He shut the lid down upon the box hastily, and put it into Kate's hands with a decisive gesture; he made her hold it while he tied it in silence. Then, in a voice not his, he asked her to take the box to Sitabhai with his compliments. 'No,' he continued, seeing the alarm in her eyes. 'She won't —she daren't hurt you now. Her child's coming along with us; and I'll go with you, of course, as far as I can. Glory be, it's the last journey that you'll ever undertake in this infernal land. The last but one, that's to say. We live at high pressure in Rhatore—too high pressure for me. Be quick, if you love me.'

Kate hastened to put on her helmet, while Tarvin amused the two princes by allowing them to inspect his revolver, and promising at some more fitting season to shoot as many coins as they should demand. The lounging escort at the door was suddenly scattered by a trooper

from without, who flung his horse desperately through their ranks, shouting, 'A letter for Tarvin Sahib!'

Tarvin stepped into the veranda, took a crumpled half-sheet of paper from the outstretched hand, and read these words, traced painfully and laboriously in an unformed round hand:—

'Dear Mr. Tarvin—Give me the boy and keep the other thing. Your affectionate Friend.'

Tarvin chuckled and thrust the note into his waistcoat pocket. 'There is no answer,' he said—and to himself: 'You're a thoughtful girl, Sitabhai, but I'm afraid you're just a little too thoughtful. That boy's wanted for the next half-hour. Are you ready, Kate?'

The princes lamented loudly when they were told that Tarvin was riding over to the palace at once, and that, if they hoped for further entertainment, they must both go with him. 'We will go into the great Durbar Hall,' said the Maharaj Kunwar consolingly to his companion at last, 'and make all the music-boxes play together.'

'I want to see that man shoot,' said Umr Singh. 'I want to see him shoot something dead. I do not wish to go to the palace.'

'You'll ride on my horse,' said Tarvin, when the answer had been interpreted, 'and I'll make

him gallop all the way. Say, Prince, how fast do you think your carriage can go?'

'As fast as Miss Kate dares.'

Kate stepped in, and the cavalcade galloped to the palace, Tarvin riding always a little in front with Umr Singh clapping his hands on the saddle-bow.

'We must pull up at Sitabhai's wing, dear,' Tarvin cried. 'You won't be afraid to walk in under the arch with me?'

'I trust you, Nick,' she answered simply, getting out of the carriage.

'Then go in to the women's wing. Give the box into Sitabhai's hands, and tell her that I sent it back. You'll find she knows my name.'

The horse trampled under the archway, Kate at its side, and Tarvin holding Umr Singh very much in evidence. The courtyard was empty, but as they came out into the sunshine by the central fountain the rustle and whisper behind the shutters rose, as the tiger-grass rustles when the wind blows through it.

'One minute, dear,' said Tarvin, halting, 'if you can bear this sun on your head.'

A door opened and a eunuch came out, beckoning silently to Kate. She followed him and disappeared, the door closing behind her. Tarvin's heart rose into his mouth, and unconsciously he

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clasped Umr Singh so closely to his breast that the child cried out.

The whisper rose, and it seemed to Tarvin as if some one were sobbing behind the shutters. Then followed a peal of low, soft laughter, and the muscles at the corner of Tarvin's mouth relaxed. Umr Singh began to struggle in his arms.

'Not yet, young man. You must wait until—ah! thank God.'

Kate reappeared, her little figure framed against the darkness of the doorway. Behind her came the eunuch, crawling fearfully to Tarvin's side. Tarvin smiled affably, and dropped the amazed young prince into his arms. Umr Singh was borne away kicking, and ere they left the court-yard Tarvin heard the dry roar of an angry child, followed by an unmistakable yelp of pain. Tarvin smiled.

'They spank young princes in Rajputana. That's one step on the path to progress. What did she say, Kate?'

'She said I was to be sure and tell you that she knew you were not afraid. "Tell Tarvin Sahib that I knew he was not afraid."'

'Where's Umr Singh?' asked the Maharaj Kunwar from the barouche.

'He's gone to his mother. I'm afraid I can't amuse you just now, little man. I've forty thou-

sand things to do, and no time to do them in. Tell me where your father is.'

'I do not know. There has been trouble and crying in the palace. The women are always crying, and that makes my father angry. I shall stay at Mr. Estes', and play with Kate.'

'Yes. Let him stay,' said Kate quickly. 'Nick, do you think I ought to leave him?'

'That's another of the things I must fix,' said Tarvin. 'But first I must find the Maharajah, if I have to dig up Rhatore for him. What's that, little one?'

A trooper whispered to the young Prince.

'This man says that he is there,' said the Maharaj Kunwar. 'He has been there since two days. I also have wished to see him.'

'Very good. Drive home, Kate. I'll wait here.'

He re-entered the archway, and reined up. Again the whisper behind the shutter rose; and a man from a doorway demanded his business.

'I must see the Maharajah,' said Tarvin.

'Wait,' said the man. And Tarvin waited for a full five minutes, using his time for concentrated thought.

Then the Maharajah emerged, and amiability sat on every hair of his newly-oiled moustache.

For some mysterious reason Sitabhai had with-

drawn the light of her countenance from him for two days, and had sat raging in her own apartments. Now the mood had passed, and the gipsy would see him again. Therefore the Maharajah's heart was glad within him; and wisely, as befitted the husband of many wives, he did not inquire too closely into the reasons that had led to the change.

'Ah, Tarvin Sahib,' said he, 'I have not seen you for long. What is the news from the dam? Is there anything to see?'

'Maharajah Sahib, that's what I've come to talk about. There is nothing to see, and I think that there is no gold to be got at.'

'That is bad,' said the King lightly.

'But there is a good deal to be seen, if you care to come along. I don't want to waste your money any more, now I'm sure of the fact; but I don't see the use of saving all the powder on the dam. There must be five hundred pounds of it.'

'I do not understand,' said the Maharajah, whose mind was occupied with other things.

'Do you want to see the biggest explosion that you've ever seen in your life. Do you want to hear the earth shake, and see the rocks fly?'

The Maharajah's face brightened.

'Will it be seen from the palace?' he said; 'from the top of the palace?'

'Oh yes. But the best place to watch it will be from the side of the river. I shall put the river back at five o'clock. It's three o'clock now. Will you be there, Maharajah Sahib?'

'I will be there. It will be a big *tamasha*. Five hundred pounds of powder! The earth will be rent in two.'

'I should remark. And after that, Maharajah Sahib, I am going to be married; and then I am going away. Will you come to the wedding?'

The Maharajah shaded his eyes from the sun-glare, and peered up at Tarvin under his turban.

'By God, Tarvin Sahib,' said he, 'you are a quick man. So you will marry the doctor-lady, and then you will go away? I will come to the wedding. I and Pertab Singh.'

The next two hours in the life of Nicholas Tarvin will never be adequately chronicled. There was a fierce need upon him to move mountains and shift the poles of the earth; there was a strong horse beneath him, and in his heart the knowledge that he had lost the Naulahka and gained Kate. When he appeared, a meteor amid the coolies on the dam, they understood, and a word was spoken that great things were toward. The gang foreman turned to his shouts, and learned that the order

of the day was destruction—the one thing that the Oriental fully comprehends.

They dismantled the powder-shed with outcries and fierce yells, hauled the bullock-carts from the crown of the dam, and dropped the derrick after them, and tore down the mat and grass coolie-lines. Then, Tarvin urging them always, they buried the powder-casks in the crown of the half-built dam, piled the wrapped charges upon them, and shovelled fresh sand atop of all.

It was a hasty onslaught, but the powder was at least all in one place; and it should be none of Tarvin's fault if the noise and smoke at least did not delight the Maharajah.

A little before five he came with his escort, and Tarvin, touching fire to a many-times-lengthened fuse, bade all men run back. The fire ate slowly the crown of the dam. Then with a dull roar the dam opened out its heart in a sheet of white flame, and the masses of flying earth darkened the smoke above.

The ruin closed on itself for an instant ere the waters of the Amet plunged forward into the gap, made a boiling rapid, and then spread themselves lazily along their accustomed levels.

The rain of things descending pitted the earth of the banks and threw the water in sheets and spurts. Then only the smoke and the blackened

flanks of the dam, crumbling each minute as the river sucked them down, remained to tell of the work that had been.

'And now, Maharajah Sahib, what do I owe you?' said Tarvin, after he had satisfied himself that none of the more reckless coolies had been killed.

'That was very fine,' said the Maharajah. 'I never saw that before. It is a pity that it cannot come again.'

'What do I owe you?' repeated Tarvin.

'For that? Oh, they were my people. They ate a little grain, and many were from my jails. The powder was from the arsenal. What is the use to talk of paying? Am I a *bunnia* that I can tell what there is to pay? It was a fine *tamasha*. By God, there is no dam left at all.'

'You might let me put it right.'

'Tarvin Sahib, if you waited one year, or perhaps two years, you would get a bill; and besides, if anything was paid, the men who pay the convicts would take it all, and I should not be richer. They were my people, and the grain was cheap, and they have seen the *tamasha*. Enough. It is not good to talk of payment. Let us return to the city. By God, Tarvin Sahib, you are a quick man. Now there will be no one to play pachisi with me or to make me laugh. And the

Maharaj Kunwar will be sorry also. But it is good that a man should marry. Yes, it is good. Why do you go, Tarvin Sahib? Is it an order of the Government?'

'Yes; the American Government. I am wanted there to help govern my State.'

'No telegram has come for you,' said the King simply. 'But you are so quick.'

Tarvin laughed lightly, wheeled his horse, and was gone, leaving the King interested but unmoved. He had finally learned to accept Tarvin and his ways as a natural phenomenon beyond control. As he drew rein instinctively opposite the missionary's door and looked for an instant at the city, the sense of the otherness of things daily seen that heralds swift coming change smote the mind of the American, and he shivered. 'It was a bad dream—a very bad dream,' he muttered, 'and the worst of it is not one of the boys in Topaz would ever believe half of it.' Then the eyes that swept the arid landscape twinkled with many reminiscences. 'Tarvin, my boy, you've played with a kingdom, and for results it lays over monkeying with the buzz-saw. You were left when you sized this State up for a played-out hole in the ground; badly left. If you have been romping around six months after something you hadn't the sabe to hold when you'd got you've learned that much. . . . Topaz! Poor

old Topaz!' Again his eyes ran round the tawny horizon, and he laughed aloud. The little town under the shadow of Big Chief, ten thousand miles away and all ignorant of the mighty machinery that had moved on its behalf, would have resented that laugh; for Tarvin, fresh from events that had shaken Rhatore to its heart, was almost patronising the child of his ambition.

He brought his hand down on his thigh with a smack, and turned his horse toward the telegraph-office. 'How in the name of all that's good and holy,' said he, 'am I to clear up this business with the Mutrie? Even a copy of the Naulahka in glass would make her mouth water.' The horse cantered on steadily, and Tarvin dismissed the matter with a generous sweep of his free hand. 'If I can stand it she can. But I'll prepare her by electricity.'

The dove-coloured telegraph-operator and Postmaster-General of the State remembers even to-day how the Englishman who was not an Englishman, and, therefore, doubly incomprehensible, climbed for the last time up the narrow stairs, sat down in the broken chair, and demanded absolute silence; how, at the end of fifteen minutes' portentous meditation and fingering of a thin moustache, he sighed heavily as is the custom of Englishmen when they have eaten that which disagrees with them, waved the operator aside, called up the next

office, and clicked off a message with a haughty and high-stepping action of the hands. How he lingered long and lovingly over the last click, applied his ear to the instrument as though it could answer, and turning with a large sweet smile said—'Finis, Babu. Make a note of that,' and swept forth chanting the war-cry of his State:

> It is not wealth nor rank nor state,
> But get-up-and-git that makes men great.

* * * * *

The bullock-cart creaked down the road to Rawut Junction in the first flush of a purple evening, and the low ranges of the Aravullis showed as many coloured cloud banks against the turquoise sky-line. Behind it the red rock of Rhatore burned angrily on the yellow floors of the desert, speckled with the shadows of the browsing camels. Overhead the crane and the wild duck were flocking back to their beds in the reeds, and grey monkeys, family by family, sat on the roadside, their arms round one another's necks. The evening star came up from behind a jagged peak of rock and brushwood, so that its reflection might swim undisturbed at the bottom of an almost dried reservoir, buttressed with time-yellowed marble and flanked with silver plume-grass. Between the star and the earth wheeled huge fox-headed bats

and night-jars hawking for the feather-winged moths. The buffaloes had left their water-holes, and the cattle were lying down for the night. Then villagers in far-away huts began to sing, and the hillsides were studded with home lights. The bullocks grunted as the driver twisted their tails, and the high grass by the roadside brushed with the wash of a wave of the open beach against the slow-turning tires.

The first breath of a cold-weather night made Kate wrap her rugs about her more closely. Tarvin was sitting at the back of the cart, swinging his legs and staring at Rhatore before the bends of the roads should hide it. The realisation of defeat, remorse, and the torture of an over well-trained conscience were yet to come to Kate. In that hour, luxuriously disposed upon many cushions, she realised nothing more than a woman's complete contentment with the fact that there was a man in the world to do things for her, though she had not yet learned to lose her interest in how they were done.

The reiterated and passionate farewells of the women in the palace, and the cyclonic sweep of a wedding at which Nick had refused to efface himself as a bridegroom should, but had flung all their world forward on the torrent of his own vitality, had worn her out. The yearning of homesickness

—she had seen it in Mrs. Estes' wet eyes at the missionary's house an hour before—lay strong upon her, and she would fain have remembered her plunge into the world's evil as a dream of the night, but—

'Nick,' she said, softly.

'What is it, little woman?'

'Oh, nothing; I was thinking. Nick, what *did* you do about the Maharaj Kunwar?'

'He's fixed, or I'm mistaken. Don't worry your head about that. After I'd explained a thing or two to old man Nolan he seemed to think well of inviting that young man to board with him until he starts for the Mayo College. Tumble?'

'His poor mother! If only I could have——'

'But you couldn't, little woman. Hi! Look quick, Kate! There she goes! The last of Rhatore.'

A string of coloured lights, high up on the hanging gardens of the palace, was being blotted out behind the velvet blackness of a hill shoulder. Tarvin leaped to his feet, caught the side of the cart, and bowed profoundly after the Oriental manner.

The lights disappeared one by one, even as the glories of a necklace had slidden into a Kabuli grape-box, till there remained only the flare from a window on a topmost bastion—a point of light as red and as remote as the blaze of the Black

Diamond. That passed too, and the soft darkness rose out of the earth fold upon fold wrapping the man and the woman.

'After all,' said Tarvin, addressing the new-lighted firmament, 'that was distinctly a side issue.'

THE END

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